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THE OPPOSITION UNDER GEORGE THE THIRD

WILKES, SHERIDAN, FOX

The Opposition under George the Third

BY

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THE OPPOSITION UNDER GEORGE III.

JOHN WILKES.

GEORGE THE THIRD differed in some notable respects from his two immediate predecessors on the throne of Great Britain and Ireland. They were Germans by birth, whereas he was the first English-born king of the family chosen by Act of Parliament to reign over this country. They did not thoroughly understand any language but the German. His mother-tongue was English, which he spoke with bewildering fluency, and he was nearly as prolific, though not quite so clever a letter-writer as Horace Walpole. Their supreme enjoyments were hoarding money, caressing ill-favoured mistresses, and living in Hanover. He never visited Hanover; he never kept a mistress; though he lived frugally, yet he was not greedy of money, excepting for the purposes of corruption, the debts thus incurred during his reign amounting to three million, three hundred and ninety-eight thousand pounds. They submitted to the decisions of Parliament, and acted upon the advice of responsible ministers. His absorbing passion was

to exercise personal and independent authority. They made no parade of religious sentiments. His piety was ostentatious; he was punctilious in his devotions, consulting his archbishops as to the clothes he should wear when taking the sacrament. In contrast to his predecessors, he was a pattern of conjugal fidelity, yet in one thing he was in thorough accord with them; he faithfully followed the worst tradition of his house by quarrelling with his eldest son.

It was announced, in the first speech George the Third addressed to Parliament, that he gloried in the name of Briton. He uniformly professed himself proud to reign over a free country; he loved to style himself the father of his people, and to hear courtiers hail him, which they did with all the sincerity of their class, as the best of princes; while his perpetual endeavour was to govern his kingdom according to the dictates of his own will. When he could not attain his purpose by being candid and truthful, which was very seldom, he had recourse to deceit and falsehood. His first act as a sovereign was to tell a deliberate lie, and his second to command his groom to do likewise. An avowed worshipper of the British Constitution, he scrupulously respected it in the spirit and the letter unless he found it necessary, which was very often, to disregard it in order to compass his designs. One of his rules of conduct tallied with the most flagitious of the maxims enunciated by Machiavelli, the maxim that a ruler might violate a pledge when the reasons which made him give it no longer prevailed, and when its observance would operate to his detriment, and that this was justifiable because, men being deceitful, they would fail to keep faith with him, consequently he was not bound to keep

faith with them.* A declared lover of peace on becoming king, he waged two of the longest, bloodiest, most wanton and bootless wars of modern times.

When a young monarch, he beheld with extreme concern and abhorrence the strife and struggles, the foolish bickerings and endless rivalries of politicians, and, being imbued with Bolingbroke's "Idea of a Patriot King," he formed the project of restoring peace and harmony by supplanting the dominant body with a faction composed exclusively of his own friends. To the leaders of the Whig party, by whom George the Second had been splendidly served and the nation raised to a pinnacle of glory, he was uniformly and unappeasably hostile. That party had rendered his family the incalculable service of elevating it to the throne, and had kept it there despite incessant plots, and more than one armed attempt of uncompromising Jacobites to depose the Hanoverian dynasty and restore the Pretender. But the Whigs were as consistently opposed to the revival and exercise of the old royal prerogative as they were to the reinstatement of the House of Stuart, while George the Third considered it natural and fitting that the Stuarts should be doomed to languish and die in exile, and that he should govern England as despotically as they had done. He rallied round him great nobles and influential commoners, who prided themselves upon supporting the most extravagant claims of the Crown, and who regarded with scorn and loathing the supremacy

* "Non può pertanto un signore prudente, nè debbe osservare la fede, quando tale osservanzia gli torni contro, e che sono spente le cagioni che la fecero promettere. E se gli uomini fussero tutti buoni, questo procetto non sarebbe buono; ma perchè sono tristi, e non l'osservebbero a te, tu ancora non l'hai da osservare a loro."—Il Principe. Opere di Machiavelli. Vol. iv. p. 337.

of Parliament. By appointing Jacobites to high office he gained them over to his side; they served him the more unreservedly upon finding that he was as anxious to illustrate their favourite doctrine of royal superiority as any Stuart who professed to have a mission from Heaven to act the tyrant. Moreover, they had the unspeakable satisfaction of observing the Whigs, who had laboured to found constitutional government, fall into marked disfavour with the sovereign, and forced to relinquish their power. Even the Jacobite country squires who, according to Addison, maintained that there had been no fine weather since the Revolution, now cheerfully admitted that things had changed for the better.

In reality, the reign of George the Third was a revolution. It was a revolution accomplished without the shedding of blood, yet it was accompanied with much tribulation, and was not effected without a vigorous resistance. Some of the warmest adherents of the House of Brunswick could not brook that it should reproduce the worst characteristics of the House of Stuart; that the forms of the Constitution, as established at the Revolution, should be perverted to give effect to the chimeras of madmen or the sophisms of knaves; to doctrines of the prerogative as monstrous and prejudicial as those propagated by Sir Robert Filmer and enforced by Lord Keeper Finch. The substitution of royal supremacy for Constitutional Government was viewed by many loyal subjects of George the Third with the utmost dismay and distress. Their disapprobation was expressed in countless sarcasms, and in emphatic phrases which were interpreted as treasonable. Throughout the King's entire

reign there was no lack of protests and denunciations, but the discontent was manifested most vehemently during the opening portion of it. Among the earlier critics and opponents of the King's policy, the most pointed and virulent, persistent and audacious, the most sorely tried, and, in the end, the most successful, was John Wilkes, who had been High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire in the reign of George the Second, who was Colonel of the Bucks regiment of militia, and who, as a member of the Whig party, represented the borough of Aylesbury in Parliament.

I.

ORIGIN AND CAREER OF WILKES.

LEIGHTON BUZZARD was the original abode of the Wilkes family. In the reigns of James the First and Charles the First, Edward Wilkes, the great-grandfather of the celebrated John, had three sons and one daughter born to him there. The boys were christened respectively Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the girl was christened Joan. Luke Wilkes became Chief Yeoman of the king's wardrobe; he settled in London and married, leaving behind him a son, Israel. This Israel Wilkes followed the lucrative trade of a distiller, amassed a considerable fortune, lived in an expensive style, and indulged in what was then accounted the extraordinary luxury of a coach-and-six. His wife was a Dissenter. Though a Churchman himself, yet he sometimes accompanied her to chapel, driving thither in his costly equipage, thus parading his own tolerance and exciting the envy of his poorer neighbours. He had three sons and two daughters. Israel, the eldest son, emigrated to America, and settled in New York. The second son, John, being a lad of great promise, was destined for the profession of the law. Heaton, the youngest son, succeeded to his father's distillery: failing in the trade of making spirits, he tried to retrieve his fortune by selling coal, and died a poor man. The elder

daughter played in real life a part similar to that of Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, living continually in a room from which daylight was shut out, and in which a lamp or candle was kept burning; she died at an early age. The younger daughter was twice married; she lived for some years in the United States, and returned to England with a second husband.

Born in London on the 17th of October, 1727, John Wilkes was first sent to Hertford, where he was taught the rudiments of learning, and then to a private school in Aylesbury, kept by the Rev. Mr. Leeson, a Presbyterian clergyman. This gentleman afterwards accompanied him in the capacity of private tutor to the University of Leyden. A writer, apparently acquainted with the Wilkes family, gives as the reason why a Dutch university was preferred to an English one, that the father "was so much attached to revolution principles, that, in order to escape from the possible contagion of a political stain, the son was not allowed to complete his education at either of the English universities. He was therefore sent to Leyden to finish his studies in the country which had given birth to William III."* The Rev. Dr. Carlyle, who was also a student at this Dutch university, records that about twenty-two British students were there at this time, among them were Charles Townshend and Dowdeswell, both of whom rose to be Chancellors of the Exchequer. He says that Wilkes had an "ugly countenance," but in conversation was a "sprightly and entertaining fellow," very fond of shining in conversation, and had then a

* Stephens' Memoirs of J. Horne Tooke, vol. i. p. 89.

liking for the Scotch.* At Leyden, John Wilkes learned a good deal of Latin, a fair amount of Greek, to converse in French with facility, to love liberty, and to make a graceful bow. Before returning home he made a tour through Holland, the Austrian Netherlands, and part of Germany, becoming acquainted in the course of his travels with young Englishmen of rank and wealth, who were making the grand tour, among others with the Duke of Grafton.

Shortly after his return to England he married, at the age of twenty-two, Miss Mead, who was ten years his senior and an heiress. Mrs. Mead, an old and intimate friend of the family, had planned the match in concert with his father, preferring to have this clever and accomplished young man for a son-in-law to any of the numerous suitors for her daughter's hand and money. Miss Mead dutifully assented to this arrangement, and did so rather to gratify her mother than to please herself, while John Wilkes as dutifully acquiesced in a scheme designed by his fond father to give him a rich wife. The married pair had nothing in common. They were as ill-assorted as any couple whose sufferings ever moved a reader of romance, or whose errors ever brought them into the Divorce Court. The lady was a rigid Dissenter; the gentleman was a professed member of the Church of England, regular in attending church, and taking the sacrament. To the end of his days he continued a member of the Church; he impressed on his daughter the importance of being a good churchwoman, and exemplary in her behaviour. In a letter to her written from Brighton in 1776, in which he states that many of the

* Autobiography of the Rev. Dr. Carlyle, p. 168.

fishermen there had become Methodists, he shows that his own attachment to the established religion, if sincere, was not very profound :—"I remain, however, sound in the faith, and will keep to my good orthodox mother, the Church of England, to the last moment of its legal establishment."* For many years he subscribed twelve guineas to a fund for supporting the civil and religious rights of Dissenters; from this fact and others, Mr. Almon, his biographer, deduces the inference that Wilkes had no "bigoted or obstinate tenacity concerning religion." His wife liked a quiet and retired life; he enjoyed a life of bustle and gaiety. She was selfish and uncharitable; he was self-indulgent and indifferent to her. Later in life he thus defined their relative positions :—"In my non-age, to please an indulgent father, I married a woman half as old again as myself; of a large fortune,—my own being that of a gentleman. It was a sacrifice to Plutus, not to Venus." †

For some time after marriage, the pair resided alternately at Aylesbury and with Mrs. Mead in Red Lion Court, London. Their only child, a daughter, was born in Mrs. Mead's house. Wilkes, becoming tired of living with his mother-in-law, removed to what was then the fashionable locality of Great George Street, Westminster. Here he entertained much good company composed of bad characters, vexing his wife by his extravagance, and shocking her with his acquaintances. Among his guests was Thomas Potter, son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, member for Aylesbury, the intimate friend of Pitt, ‡ and one of the

* "Letters to his Daughter," vol. i. p. 19.
† Almon's Memoirs of Wilkes, vol i. p. 22.
‡ In a letter to his nephew, dated the 7th of October, 1756, Pitt

notorious rakes of the day. Another was Lord Sandwich, the Rochester, minus the wit and the repentance, of the reign of George the Third. Sir Francis Dashwood was another of his companions, a man who had the ingenuity to add a novelty to depravity, who aspired to be the chief among profligates, and who loved nothing but vice. That men like these should have been hateful to Mrs. Wilkes, is not wonderful. Yet her austerity of mind was exceeded in intensity by her dislike to spend money. Her husband might have continued to entertain his disreputable, though fashionable, friends, without forfeiting her regard; but she could not assent to his launching out into the extravagance of procuring a seat in Parliament.

At the general election in 1754, Wilkes appeared as a candidate to represent Berwick-upon-Tweed, and he told the electors, "I come here uncorrupting, and I promise you I shall ever be uncorrupted. As I never will take a bribe, so I never will offer one." Similar protestations and pledges have been made by other candidates for seats in Parliament, and other unsuccessful candidates have exposed themselves to the imputation which his friend Mr. Almon brings against him; "notwithstanding Mr. Wilkes's fine speech about virtue and patriotism, this experiment cost him between three and four thousand pounds."* His failure was not attributable either to parsimony or to lack of daring. The Delaval family was dominant in the borough, and many of their supporters resided in London. These electors were sent, at the expense of the family, to record their votes,

says, "Mr. Potter is one of the best friends I have in the world.—*Chatham Correspondence*, vol. i. p. 172.

* Almon's Memoirs of Wilkes, vol. i. p. 27.

and, out of economy, were conveyed by sea. Wilkes bribed the master of the vessel in which they had embarked to land them on the coast of Norway, which was done, greatly to the surprise of the passengers, and to the extreme annoyance of the Delaval family.* Moreover, he presented a petition against the successful candidate on the ground of bribery.

Soon after Wilkes returned to London, his wife and he agreed that, if they lived apart, they would live more happily; accordingly, a formal separation took place. He retained the custody of his infant daughter, whom he reared with great good sense, whom he tenderly loved, and who, in after years, repaid him with her undivided affection. A widower in all but the name, he engaged with the zest and eagerness of a young and giddy bachelor in the occupation, so fascinating to foolish young men, which is euphemistically called sowing wild oats. The first use he made of his freedom was to endeavour to become a monk. The order he desired to join, and the monastery in which he succeeded in passing his noviciate, had been instituted for the purpose of ridiculing sacred things, and making a religion of blasphemy; the founder of this peculiar order being Sir Francis Dashwood, to whose depraved mind it occurred that a new relish might be given to debauchery by combining the practice of lewdness with a parody upon the rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

Sir Francis Dashwood was a member of the Dilettanti Society, having qualified himself for admission,

* Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i. p. 144.

according to Walpole, by visiting Italy and being seldom sober. When at Rome, he attended service in the Sistine Chapel on Good Friday. On that day penitents enter the chapel with a small scourge in their hands, and, when the lights are extinguished by the officiating priest, bare their shoulders and lash themselves as an atonement for their sins. Sir Francis conceived that there was much more pretence than suffering in the self-inflicted penance. He entered the chapel with the rest, having a horsewhip concealed beneath his coat. As soon as the last candle was put out, and the flagellation had begun, he walked along the middle of the chapel laying his whip heavily across the naked shoulders of the congregation. The sufferers shrieked out in their anguish that the devil was in their midst. Sir Francis made his escape; but it was soon discovered that it was he who had insulted, as well as beaten, the congregation, and he was obliged to flee for his life from the Papal territory.*

After his return home he restored an old Cistertian abbey at Medmenham, on the left bank of the Thames, between Great Marlow and Henley, where the scenery is most beautiful, richly-wooded heights diversifying the stretches of green meadow land, and where the silver stream winds in front of the edifice which had been dedicated to the service of Heaven. Here it was that Sir Francis Dashwood formed a brotherhood of kindred profligates. They spent a portion of each year in the abbey, inhabiting the cells, making a mockery of the service of the Church, feasting in the great hall, and singing blasphemous and obscene songs.

* Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. i., p. 172.

To be one of the twelve who played the leading parts in this horrible travesty was the ambition of the men of fashion in those days, and required, on the part of the successful competitors, pre-eminence in wickedness. A vacancy having occurred, two men, who had undergone their noviciate, were candidates for what, in the depravity of their minds, they deemed a distinction. They were Lord Sandwich and John Wilkes. As the greater reprobate of the two, Lord Sandwich was chosen. Wilkes revenged himself by a practical joke. Confining a baboon, dressed according to the common representations of the Evil One, within a chest in the room wherein the profane revellers were feasting and uttering impious jests, he let the animal loose at the moment Lord Sandwich invoked his master the Devil. The consternation was indescribable: the company believed that the Devil in person had answered the summons. The baboon, as terrified as the most awe-stricken of the party, bounded about the room, and by chance leaped upon Lord Sandwich's shoulders. Fearing, for the moment, that his end was come, the wicked nobleman recanted his former utterances, protesting that he did not mean what he said, praying to Heaven for mercy with all the fervour of a cowardly sinner. A window being opened, the baboon escaped through it; the revellers recovered their spirits, and resumed their orgy; but Lord Sandwich never forgave Wilkes, to whom the trick was attributed, for having caused him such a fright. The adventure was noised abroad, and lost nothing in repetition; that Satan had actually appeared to his worshippers was generally believed. So strong was the popular feeling that it was considered prudent to

dissolve the society, and allow the building to fall into decay.* Several years afterwards Sir Francis Dashwood, with the levity which prompted him to establish the mock order of St. Francis, resolved to build a church. He selected the top of a hill for the site, because an edifice placed there looked well from the windows of his house. Whereupon Wilkes wrote: "Some churches have been built from devotion, others from parade and vanity; I believe this is the first church which has been built for a prospect." †

In 1757, he took his seat in the House of Commons as member for the borough of Aylesbury. A vacancy had occurred owing to Mr. Potter having been appointed Vice-Treasurer for Ireland. Pitt desired to sit for Bath, and vacated his seat for Okehampton, Potter taking his place. The total expenses of the three elections amounted to £7000, and they were borne by Wilkes. If his friends did him a service, they made him pay for it. Being pressed for money, he tried to regain possession of the annuity of £200 a year settled on his wife, and in the attempt he violated the deed of separation between them. He was rebuked for this by the Court of King's Bench, and warned against interfering with his wife's freedom of action.

One of his first acts after his election was to tender his support to Pitt, and formally acknowledge him as his political chief, in the following terms:—"I am

* The only detailed account of these proceedings is in "Chrysal," a work which in the guise of fiction represents real occurrences. The author, Charles Johnstone, was either present at the Medmenham orgies, or else conversed with eye-witnesses. Vol. iii. pp. 231 to 249.

† Memoirs, vol. iii. p. 56.

very happy now to contribute more than my warmest wishes for the support of his wise and excellent measures, and my ambition will ever be to have my parliamentary conduct approved by the ablest Minister, as well as the first character, of the age. I live in the hope of doing my country some small services at least; and I am sure the only certain way of doing any is by a steady support of your measures." * He had already attained the local distinction of serving as High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire. He had been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. As a Member of Parliament he showed himself active and useful in advocating a bill for the re-establishment of the Militia, a measure upon which Pitt set great store, and to which the opposition was very warm and determined. After the bill became law, Wilkes was rewarded with the appointment of Lieutenant-Colonel in the newly-raised Bucks Regiment of Militia, a regiment which was stationed at Winchester to guard the French prisoners collected there. It was as a Militia field-officer that Wilkes made the acquaintance of an obscure Militia captain in a Hampshire regiment, now known to all the world as the historian of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* When the colonelcy of the Bucks regiment became vacant, Wilkes was promoted to it.

At this period in his career Dr. Smollett appealed to him to confer a favour upon Dr. Johnson. The great lexicographer had no admiration for Wilkes personally, the latter having made a comment he did not relish on this passage in the grammar prefixed to the *English Dictionary:* "H seldom, perhaps never,

* Chatham Correspondence, vol. i. p. 239.

begins any but the first syllable." Wilkes remarked: "The author of this observation must be a man of quick appre-hension, and of a most compre-hensive genius." Yet, when Johnson's black servant, Francis Barber, was taken by a press-gang on board the *Star* frigate, the member for Aylesbury was requested to use his influence with the Admiralty to procure the lad's release, on the ground that "the boy is a sickly lad of a delicate frame, and particularly subject to a malady of the throat, which renders him very unfit for his Majesty's service." The application was at once made, and the request granted. For this Smollett returned thanks, saying, "your generosity with respect to Johnson shall be the theme of our applause and thanksgiving." Nor did he scruple to ask a service for himself, or fail to obtain it. When he wrote a work which he styled the "History of England," Smollett evinced the sincerity of his professions by heaping the grossest obloquy upon his benefactor.

At the general election in 1761, Wilkes was re-elected member for Aylesbury without opposition. He had taken the precautions, then necessary, for ensuring his return. His experience led him to warn each of his friends against following his example, and contending for the favour of the burgesses of Aylesbury, as "his constituents would be a heavy tax on his table and his cellar." Indeed, he soon found that a seat in Parliament was too costly a luxury for a man of his moderate fortune and expensive tastes. Like many other clever men in the same situation before and since, he aspired to a lucrative post in the public service. An application to be sent as ambassador to Constantinople, in succession to Sir James Porter,

was rejected. He next expressed "his ambition to have gone to Quebec, the first Governor, to have reconciled the new subjects to the English, and to have shown the French the advantage of the mild rule of laws over that of lawless power and despotism." In this, too, he was disappointed, and his non-success he laid to the charge of the Earl of Bute, who had become Secretary of State, and an influential member of the Government, and who made it a rule rigorously to require two tests of merit in those he favoured; Toryism in politics, and birth north of the Tweed. It was, then, with feelings of personal resentment, as well as of political antipathy, that Wilkes witnessed the extraordinary and sudden elevation of Lord Bute to the office of Prime Minister.

The public, which had not forgiven the disgrace of their favourite Pitt, were at first simply amazed to witness the favourite of the King put at the head of the government, and to learn that a Scottish representative peer had entered the House of Lords and delivered his first speech there in the capacity of Premier; but the feeling of surprise was soon transmuted into a state of suppressed anger which could easily be kindled into fury. What made the dissatisfaction more noteworthy was that it represented a reaction in the public mind since the king had mounted the throne amidst national rejoicing. The people were prepared to trust their new sovereign with a heartiness they could not manifest towards his predecessors of foreign birth and sympathies, who made no disguise of their opinion that to be Electors of Hanover was more honourable than to be Kings of Great Britain. When George the Third told Parliament, "Born and bred in this country,

I glory in the name of Briton, and the peculiar happiness of my life will ever consist in promoting the welfare of a people whose loyalty and warm affection I consider as the greatest and most permanent security of my throne," he awakened the utmost enthusiasm alike within the walls of St. Stephen's and throughout the country. The Great Commoner had not then been obliged to resign, nor had the acknowledged Favourite been promoted to the highest office. So extreme was the desire to reciprocate the cordial sentiments of the monarch, that the address of the House of Lords, which resembles a piece of oriental sycophancy rather than the rational production of sensible Englishmen, did not, in the peculiar circumstances of the time, excite ridicule and disgust. A panegyrist of George the Third has even ventured to style the most odious passage in this address "peculiarly elegant and happy,"* the passage being as follows:—"We are penetrated with the condescending and endearing manner in which your Majesty has expressed your satisfaction at having received your birth and education among us. What a lustre does it cast upon the name of Briton when you, sire, are pleased to esteem it among your glories." The Commons were equally demonstrative and still more foolish. The King having returned what was fulsomely termed a most gracious reply to their address of congratulation, they unanimously voted him an address of thanks for the graciousness of his reply.

When it was perceived, however, that the King's satisfaction at being born and bred a Briton meant

* Adolphus in his History of George III., vol. i. p. 16.

that he purposed having his own way, and undoing, as far as possible, the work of the Revolution, his popularity sank as rapidly as it had arisen, and sullen resentment took the place of open satisfaction. The injudicious conduct of Lord Bute aggravated the popular discontent. Not satisfied with compassing the resignation of Pitt and compelling the Duke of Newcastle to make way for him as head of the Treasury, he stooped to make sweeping changes in the minor offices; to turn off poor doorkeepers and tidewaiters, whose only shortcoming was to have been the nominees of a Whig minister or the connections of a Whig family, and to substitute for them others whose only merit consisted in being his dependants and countrymen. He turned out every one who owed office to the Whig party, with the single exception, as was wittily said, of the King. In the City, where Pitt was almost worshipped as a divinity, Bute was execrated as an emissary of darkness. His friends gave him advice as to his conduct towards his revilers. The following was the counsel of Lord Melcombe, a sham patriot, who avowedly guided all his actions in view of the possible result on quarter-day:—"The insolence of the City is intolerable. They must, and they easily may, be taught better manners. . . . As to you, my dear lord, I am sure you laugh at them, and know that the moment they are threatened with the King's displeasure, those who *were* at your throat will be at your feet."

All the blunders and excesses of Lord Bute were rendered the more obnoxious by the scandal commonly repeated and generally credited that, in addition to being the King's favourite, he was

improperly beloved by the King's mother. When he entered the service of Frederick, Prince of Wales, Lord Waldegrave describes him as having "a good person, fine legs, and a theatrical air of the greatest importance. There is an extraordinary appearance both in his look and manner of speaking; for whether the subject be serious or trifling, he is equally pompous, slow, and sententious." The same authority records that the Prince used often to say that "Bute was a fine, showy man, who would make an excellent ambassador in a Court where there was no business." * It is certain that his first success at the Prince's Court was in acting the part of Lothario in amateur theatricals. Lord Waldegrave intimates that the sagacity of the Princess had discovered accomplishments in him "of which the Prince her husband may not, perhaps, have been the most competent judge." † Rightly or wrongly, the public attributed to the royal personage and the Scottish nobleman an intimacy which, if authenticated, would have subjected both to the penalties for high treason. Where imputations of this kind are once made they are seldom disproved; the accused, if innocent, would never volunteer to justify themselves at the bar of public opinion, nor would they dare to avow their guilt. The number of those who, in matters of this kind, are ready to infer guilt without evidence is always in excess of the number of fair-minded and impartial persons who discredit an unproven charge. Good society in those days thought nothing more natural than immorality in high places, and the multitude was as

* Memoirs of Lord Waldegrave, p. 38.
† Memoirs, p. 39.

ready to believe the worst as the richer and better educated. Accordingly, Lord Bute was pronounced guilty.

He was charged with another offence, rather less heinous and quite incapable of disproof, the offence of being a Scottish nobleman. To have committed the most serious lapse from virtue was, in the eyes of our forefathers, at the middle of the Eighteenth century, an offence which might be overlooked or forgiven; but for a Minister of State to have been born in Scotland, and, still worse, to be the member of an old Scottish family, was an unpardonable sin; it was treason against the Constitution. During the reign of James the First, his countrymen who followed him southwards were ridiculed by the English for their uncouthness, and envied for their good fortune. Charles the First, who was a Scotchman by birth, did not specially favour the natives of the North, and they did not spare him when he was in their power. But it was not till the middle of the Eighteenth century that a Scotchman was regarded as the incarnation of human depravity. This national prejudice, originating in terror, grew into detestation.

The Rebellion in 1745 of those who, in the phrase of Johnson, were savage clans and roaming barbarians, had all but succeeded in its object. Derby was occupied by the army of the Pretender; London was in imminent peril and daily expectation of being occupied also. Culpable weakness on the part of the Government contributed to the success of the rebels. Pelham, the Prime Minister, did not believe in the extent of the danger; his brother, the Duke of Newcastle, a Secretary of State, was quivering with fright, and

prophesied the restoration of the Stuarts. Believing the alarm to be exaggerated, Pelham would not act with vigour; desiring to be accounted a true prophet, the Duke of Newcastle would not act at all. If the rebels had not retreated of their own accord, Prince Charlie might have had his own again, and the people of England would have lost all that they most valued. The danger was averted by accident, rather than timely action. But the citizens of London long remembered the dark days, when there was a run upon the Bank and payments were made in sixpences, when all the shops were shut, when all credit was destroyed, when each citizen anxiously asked his neighbour when the last struggle would take place between the Highlanders, flushed with victory, and raw levies, who had never seen a shot fired in anger. It was known that George the Second had personal courage; it was believed that if he thought the event worth a battle he would risk his life to retain his crown; but it was doubted whether he might not set sail for the Electorate of Hanover he loved, and, by departing at the critical juncture, forfeit the crown in his own person and that of his dynasty. Fortunately for the Hanoverian succession and for constitutional government, the rebels lost heart at the moment when the prize was within their grasp. Throughout England their presence was long remembered with feelings of humiliation; all the injuries they wrought, all the terrors they caused, were associated with whoever came from beyond the Tweed. In reality, a lowland Scot is as little of a Highlander as a native of Essex, and in race and speech is more English than a Cornishman. The Rebellion failed because the chiefs were wanting in daring; it was

finally suppressed in such a way as to render a third rising impossible.

The Duke of Cumberland, Commander-in-Chief of the royal forces, knew the art of war as perfectly as he knew his alphabet, lost every battle in which he led an army against foreign enemies, and gained his first victory at Culloden. He was elated with unwonted success. As a victor, he displayed no magnanimity and showed no mercy. He anticipated the savage and sanguinary author of the Carmagnoles in acting on the maxim that the dead never return to trouble the living. But the Duke knew as little as Barère did, that men ruthlessly executed leave behind them memories fraught with more dire results than any deeds they could have performed had they been spared; memories which often make the living long to exchange places with the slain. Detested by his army, which he tortured into discipline; hated by the English nation, which desired a victory, but did not wish the field of conquest to be converted into shambles, he was known after his first and only great victory by the significant and degrading name of the "Butcher."

The actual danger was over many years before Lord Bute became Prime Minister. When the American army of the North captured Richmond; when the Italian army of Victor Emanuel entered Rome in triumph; when the French army of Versailles entered Paris, occupied by the Communists, Secession in the United States was crushed, the unity of Italy was consummated; the Commune was annihilated. In none of these cases was there any likelihood of the particular work requiring to be done over again. As thoroughly and completely was the Rebellion of 1745

extinguished; still, those who had shared in, or were connected by ties of nationality with those who countenanced it, were for many years objects of insurmountable suspicion and aversion. If a declared Secessionist were appointed Secretary of State by the President of the United States; if an uncompromising leader of the papal faction were appointed Prime Minister of Italy; if a notorious Communist were appointed head of a French Cabinet, many Americans, Italians, and Frenchmen would be vehement in their denunciations of men who might be honest and faithful servants of the country, but whom it required an exercise of faith to trust and charity purely Christian to respect. In like manner, despite this triumph of constitutional government in Britain over the armed partisans of divine and hereditary right, a strong and irrepressible feeling of apprehension prevailed at the spectacle of a Scottish nobleman acting as Prime Minister, and dispensing patronage to men whose loyalty to the House of Brunswick was believed to be lukewarm, and whose dislike of constitutional restraints was intense.

If Lord Bute had been a brave and strong man, he might have lived down calumny; if he had been a great orator, he might have commanded homage; if he had possessed a single gift which goes to the making of a statesman, he might have been able to maintain his ground and discomfit all his foes. But he could neither make a speech to which any one would listen with attention, nor write a letter without showing that in the elementary art of spelling he was even more backward than the most ignorant person of his rank. Walpole says his "letters grew a proverb for want of

orthography." His manners were pompous and forbidding. His single accomplishment was a species of low cunning which enabled him to conduct an intrigue; by means of it, he obtained an office which he only disgraced. His most striking success was the rapidity with which he made himself despised and detested by men of every class and every variety of sentiment. As Pitt said, with passionate vehemence, Lord Bute "had insulted the nobility, intimidated the gentry, and trampled on the people."

When he became Prime Minister he had a policy which was very simple, utterly stupid, and perfectly impracticable. He wished to do for George the Third what Strafford desired to do for Charles the First, to make him independent of Parliaments, with this difference however, that Strafford aimed at dispensing with Parliaments altogether, whereas Bute wished Parliaments to exist as the passive and obedient instruments of the sovereign. George the Third was the divinity who, when he gave the nod, was to be universally and implicitly obeyed. The young King was little of a divinity and nothing of a Jupiter. He was as full of irrational whims and fancies as a boarding-school girl, whose ideal of happiness is to have her own way, and who thinks everyone perfect who attributes perfection to her.

The first measure of the new sovereign and his new minister was to make peace with France and Spain. Both detested the war because it had been commenced by the Whigs, and its successful prosecution had reflected credit upon them. In concert with the King of Prussia, victories had been won on the Continent of Europe; in the New World, an English

army had wrested Canada from France, an English fleet had conquered the magnificent Spanish possessions of Havanna and the Philippine Islands. But peace was felt to be the one thing needful. To sue for it was to do what the Whigs would not have done had they remained in power, however ready they might have been to conclude hostilities at the request of their enemies and on terms worthy of the war. It was first necessary to betray the great King of Prussia, who was then known as our magnanimous ally; next it was essential to conclude a treaty on any conditions which our foreign enemies would accept; and, lastly, it was indispensable to secure such a majority in Parliament as would approve of a treaty, however inadequate or even ignominious, and afterwards give a firm support to Bute's Administration. George the Third fancied that if he could do these things he would be King indeed. The King of Prussia was abandoned to his fate, in disregard of solemn pledges given to him on behalf of this country: treaties were concluded with France and Spain, in which several of the most important conquests were surrendered without any equivalent; a House of Commons was bribed by Henry Fox to sanction all that had been done. The entire outlay exceeded sixty thousand pounds. When Parliament gave a decisive vote in favour of the treaty, the Princess Dowager of Wales exultingly exclaimed, "Now George, you are King!"

While these events were in progress, the nation was occupied in arguing and discussing every step with unwonted and unflagging zeal. Thousands who had never before talked or thought about the affairs of State, now concerned themselves about nothing else. Mrs. Scott,

sister of the celebrated Mrs. Montagu, gives the following illustration of the prevailing excitement:—"If you order a mason to build an oven, he immediately inquires about the progress of the peace, and descants on the preliminaries. A carpenter, instead of putting up a cupboard, talks of the Princess Dowager, of Lord Treasurers, and of Secretaries of State. Neglected lie the trowel and the chisel, the mortar dries and the glue hardens, while the persons who should use them are busied with dissertations on the government."*

The responsible head of the government had made arrangements for educating the people to applaud out of doors the resolutions confirmed within the walls of Parliament. He commissioned two men to teach the nation what to admire. The one was Dr. Smollett, an excellent novelist and a wretched pamphleteer; the other was Mr. Murphy, a worse pamphleteer and a mediocre playwright. The former edited the *Briton*, the latter the *Auditor;* both of which strove every week to convince the public that the existing Ministry was the best ever formed, and that their measures were the perfection of human wisdom. The Treasury supplied money wherewith to carry on these publications, and their two editors were expected, in return, to supply arguments warranted to stand every test and carry conviction to the mind of every reader.

The scheme might have been wholly successful had not John Wilkes made a counter-move almost equivalent to checkmate. In Parliament he spoke and voted against the Minister: firstly, because he was the opponent of Pitt; and, secondly, because he was a Scotchman. Pitt boasted that he sought for merit

* A Lady of the Last Century, p. 125.

everywhere, and he found it amid the mountains of the North; but Wilkes, who agreed with him in other things, disapproved of his treating the Scotch with simple justice. In him, as in Dr. Johnson, were concentrated the popular prejudices against those who were their fellow-countrymen, and who, because they were all supposed to wear no trowsers and to eat the food of horses, were placed outside the pale of humanity, along with the French, who wore wooden shoes and lived upon frogs. Filled with these jealousies and hatreds, and determined to circumvent the attempt of Lord Bute to gain the good opinion of the reading public, Wilkes founded the *North Briton*, as a rival to the *Briton* and the *Auditor*. In the opening sentence of the first number the key-note is struck: "The *liberty of the Press* is the birthright of a Briton, and is justly esteemed the firmest bulwark of the liberties of this country." A concluding paragraph reveals the writer's tactics:—"Though I am a North Briton, I will endeavour to write plain English, and to avoid the numerous scotticisms the *Briton* abounds with, and then, as the world is apt to mistake, he may be taken for a Scotsman, and I shall pass for an Englishman. . . I thank my stars I am a North Briton; with this almost singular circumstance belonging to me that I am unplaced and unpensioned; but I hope this reproach will soon be wiped away, and that I shall no longer be pointed at by my sneering countrymen."

Wilkes was exceptionally well qualified to conduct such a periodical. Less polished as a writer than Addison, less incisive in attack than Junius, as good a classic and as much a man of the world as the former, as reckless and brazen-faced as the latter, he had the art of

stating a case with singular lucidity, and of illustrating it in a homely and telling manner. His touch was light, and his sarcasm stinging. He anticipated Cobbett in the skill and daring with which he put and reiterated in plain terms the most unpalatable truths. He was the first political writer who not only applied to things their proper epithets, but also called persons by their proper names. The initials and innuendoes to which timorous journalists had resorted, he discarded and disowned, excepting when an allusion was more effective than a simple statement. The Ministry was suspected of truckling to France: he supplied numerous and plausible reasons in support of the common opinion. If he gave currency to a rumour, it gained credit from the phrase in which he couched it. The whispered intimacy between Lord Bute and the Princess Dowager he assumed and commented on as an undoubted and discreditable fact.

The blunders of the Ministry afforded him ample material for ridicule and condemnation. Lord Bute, who could not spell, was First Lord of the Treasury; Sir Francis Dashwood, who could not do a sum in simple addition, was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Neither knew anything more of the city than that it was a place where merchants traded and bankers dealt in money. According to Walpole, "Bute was a stranger to the magi to the east of Temple Bar, who, though they flock to a new star, expect to be talked to in a more intelligible language than that of inspiration," moreover "in the new dispensation it was difficult to say which was the worst suited to his office, the Minister or his substitute. While the former shrouded his ignorance from vulgar eyes, and dropped but now and

then from a cloud an oracular sentence, the deputy, with the familiarity and phrase of a fish-wife, introduced the humours of Wapping behind the veil of the Treasury." * This extraordinary Chancellor of the Exchequer kept the House in a roar of laughter, and aroused the indignation of the country, with his first Budget. Such an exhibition had not been witnessed since that of Mr. Samuel Sandys, who, being ambitious of a peerage, made himself a fitting subject for purchase by ranting stuff which he called republican doctrines, and obtained his first promotion by succeeding Sir Robert Walpole at the Exchequer. As a financier, Sandys was simply incompetent. Sir Francis Dashwood was a vulgar buffoon as well as a contemptible ignoramus. He talked about economy as if to repeat the word was to save money. He excited the anger and crippled the industry of the apple-growing counties by imposing an excise tax on cyder. Having made the most extraordinary Budget speech of which there is any record, and carried one of the most obnoxious of imposts, he followed the example of Sandys and resigned. He was sent by the King to join Sandys among the Peers, to adorn the Upper House with his presence and strengthen it with his ripe experience. He had no illusions as to his fate as a Minister, and he correctly predicted that "people will point at me and cry, 'There goes the worst Chancellor of the Exchequer that ever lived.'" † His ambition was to be pre-eminent, not as a patriot, but as a profligate. To him belongs the ignominy of anticipating the worship of the Goddess of Reason. In commemoration of this achievement a

* Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. i., p. 171.
† Walpole's Memoirs of George III., vol. i., p. 250.

picture was painted representing him reverentially kneeling before a naked woman.

The *North Briton's* unsparing attacks on public men, and its cynical comments on public affairs, turned the Government into a laughing-stock. Every week the circulation of the paper increased and the credit of the Government declined. The exasperated Ministers menaced Wilkes with an action for libel, as he told his readers in the twenty-seventh number. Before embarking in the enterprise, he knew that an independent and outspoken writer could not long pursue his course unchecked. Printers and publishers ran a still greater risk; indeed, he found it difficult to find a printer and publisher possessing the indispensable qualifications of indifference to being sent to Newgate. Yet he finished the work he set himself to execute without encountering the expected attack. He had to fight a duel with Lord Talbot, who considered that he had been ridiculed; but this proved a trifle, for neither was injured, and the honour of both was vindicated. Having issued the forty-fourth number, he suspended the publication of the *North Briton*, and determined that, to meet the public demand, the whole forty-four numbers should be reprinted and re-issued in volumes.

When Lord Bute's position was seemingly impregnable, when his majority in Parliament compensated by votes of confidence for his unpopularity in the streets, when the long contest, signalized by the crowning triumph of the great Frederick at Rosbach and the splendid victory of Wolfe at Quebec, had been terminated by the treaty of peace signed at Paris, and after the conditions of peace had been approved by

227 votes to 63, he astounded alike his satirists and his adherents by resigning office. The popular hatred of him had become so intense that his life was in peril, and he had to disguise himself to walk the streets in security. Throughout England he was regarded with as great animosity as in the capital. He was supposed to have suggested the cyder-tax for which Sir Francis Dashwood was responsible, and the inhabitants of the cyder counties manifested their feelings by dressing up and wreaking their wrath on "a figure in Scotch plaid, with a blue ribband, to represent the Favourite, and this figure seemed to lead by the nose an ass, royally crowned." *

His power, though great in appearance, was small in fact: he was not adequately supported in debate by those who implicitly voted with him on a division. In a private letter he thus states his case:—"Single in a Cabinet of my own forming, no soul in the House of Lords to support me except two peers (Lords Denbigh and Pomfret), both the Secretaries of State silent, and the Lord Chief Justice, whom I brought myself into office, voting for me, yet speaking against me,—the ground I tread upon is so hollow that I am afraid of not only falling myself, but of involving my royal master in my ruin. It is time for me to retire." It is doubtful if even the King repaid his devotion with unstinted support. Forty years later he told another favourite, Mr. George Rose, that he soon repented having made Bute a Secretary of State; and that though his lordship did not want talents, yet he was "deficient in political firmness." † That, after planning a scheme

* Walpole's Memoirs of George III., vol. i., p. 280.
† Diaries of the Right Honourable George Rose, vol. ii., p. 192.

to make the Sovereign supreme ruler and to act as his sole adviser, Lord Bute recoiled from obstacles he had never anticipated, is very probable. He was certainly panic-stricken: he lost his self-command; his health gave way under the pressure of anxiety and dread. To his intimate friend, Baron Mure, he wrote this account of his resignation, in which there is too much apology and not enough confession of the truth:—"From what you have heard me drop before you left this, you will not be surprised at my acquainting you with my having resigned the painful situation I held. Many and many reasons occur to justifie this in a prudential light, but none of these should have had weight with me at present if my health had permitted my continuance. The state of that made it impossible, and I yield to necessity. I have filled my office with my friend, G. Grenville, whose integrity, ability, and firmness I will be answerable for." *

George Grenville, who had succeeded Sir Francis Dashwood as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was far better qualified to be Prime Minister than Lord Bute; yet, with the exceptions of Bute and Addington, a more incompetent head of the Ministry never exercised power during the reign of George the Third. In the Speaker's chair, Grenville might have distinguished himself, and made old members cease to lament the retirement of Mr. Speaker Onslow. He was patient, methodical, pains-taking, well versed in the usages of Parliament, well stored with constitutional decisions, and unable to rise above the level of routine. If a precedent existed, he knew where to search for it, and

* Selections from the Family Papers preserved at Caldwell (privately printed), vol. ii., p. 176.

he applied it with mathematical precision; but when, in the phrase of Burke, "there was no precedent on the file," he was as helpless as a lad who knows nothing, or a man in his dotage who has forgotten all he had learned. As the brother of his friend Earl Temple, and the brother-in-law of Pitt, his political leader, Wilkes greeted the accession of Grenville as a good omen for the nation. Hence it was that he suspended the publication of the *North Briton*, and started for Paris to see his daughter, who was being educated there.

Returning to London a few weeks afterwards, immediately before the prorogation of Parliament, Wilkes called upon Earl Temple, and found him discussing with Pitt the speech from the throne, which was to be delivered that afternoon, a copy of the speech having been furnished him by his brother. Both of them denounced the speech as a statement in which truth was suppressed and falsehood implied, and they regarded its tone as a proof that, though the Favourite had left office, he was still in power. An outline of this conversation Wilkes committed to paper soon after he reached his house, and this outline, with a few immaterial additions of his own, he caused to be printed and published as a special number of his periodical. Four days later, on Saturday, the 23rd of April, 1763, appeared the *North Briton*, No. 45.

This new number was read by the Ministry as well as by the public; the King read it also. The Ministry were indignant, and the people indifferent. The King was delighted to think that a pestilent writer had made a false move. On the following Monday, the

Earl of Halifax, Secretary of State, sent a copy of No. 45, by the King's orders, to the Attorney and Solicitor General, with a request for advice as to the best mode in which to prosecute those who had written, published, and circulated the number. Next day, and before the law officers had returned an answer, Lord Halifax issued a General Warrant, authorising the bearers "to search for the authors, printers, and publishers of a seditious and treasonable paper, entitled the *North Briton*, No. 45, and them, having found, to apprehend and seize, together with their papers, and bring them before him in order to be examined." The day after this warrant was issued, the law-officers reported that the paper was "a most infamous and seditious libel, tending to inflame the minds and alienate the affections of the people from his Majesty, and to excite them to traitorous insurrections against his Government, and therefore punishable as a misdemeanour of the highest nature in due course of law by indictment or information, which latter method of prosecution is the most usual and proper, in obedience to the commands of his Majesty, when signified by a Secretary of State."

A King's messenger, named Carrington, in whom the authorities placed great confidence as one expert in discovering libellers, was entrusted with executing the warrant. He began proceedings by apprehending Dryden Leach, who had not printed the obnoxious number; this mistake he partially corrected by taking into custody Kearsley, the publisher, and Balfe, the actual printer of No. 45, and by seizing their papers. Examined by Lord Halifax and Lord Egremont, the two Secretaries of State, they averred that John Wilkes

and the Rev. Charles Churchill were the authors of all the papers. The manuscript of No. 45, as well as several letters in the handwriting of Wilkes, having been found among Kearsley's papers, these facts were communicated to the King, and, by his orders, the law officers were now asked, whether or not there was sufficient ground for apprehending Wilkes himself. They replied: "We have considered of the matter referred to us, and are humbly of opinion, that the publication of a libel, being a breach of the peace, is not a case of privilege, and that the said John Wilkes may be committed to Newgate, or any other prison, for the same, upon the evidence laid before your lordship. If Mr. Wilkes should offer bail, your lordship may, notwithstanding such offer, commit him till an inquiry can be made into such sufficiency." This opinion is dated the 30th of April. Before its receipt, orders must have been given to take Wilkes into custody; for, at six o'clock in the morning of that day, three King's messengers stationed themselves respectively at the several approaches to his house. He knew their errand, and had been expecting them. The previous night was spent by him in company with Kearsley, his publisher, at the house of Blackmore, one of the King's messengers entrusted with the execution of the General Warrant; a copy of the document itself was afterwards found among his papers. Shortly after the messengers had stationed themselves, Wilkes left his house in walking dress, whereupon Blackmore accosted him; but, on being told that he was going to see a friend in the Temple and would return to breakfast at Blackmore's house, the latter allowed him to depart. Wilkes really went to Balfe's printing-office

in the Old Bailey, there to get possession, as was supposed, of the manuscript of No. 45, and to destroy what was in type of No. 46. On his return, he was met by Watson, another of the messengers, near his house in Great George Street, and was there formally taken into custody. At his own request he was suffered to go home, where he read over the warrant, told the messengers that he was a member of Parliament, that his person was privileged, and that he would not accompany them. Upon this, Money, a messenger, went to Lord Halifax's house in the same street, and reported what had occurred. It was not till one o'clock that Wilkes, yielding to force, was brought before Lord Halifax and Lord Egremont. During the interval, several persons called at Great George Street; among others, Earl Temple and the Rev. Charles Churchill. The latter would have been taken into custody also, had he been known by sight to the messengers; however, he showed his presence of mind by taking a hint from his friend, and starting for the country. An attempt was made to get a writ of *habeas corpus;* but, owing to an informality in the affidavit, the writ could not be procured without delay.

At last, Wilkes was examined by the two Secretaries of State. Several versions have been published of what passed; the following one has not yet been made public. It was drawn up by Mr. Lovel Stanhope, Under-Secretary of State, and, as the version relied upon by the legal advisers of the Government when defending these proceedings before a court of justice, cannot have been unfavourable to the enemies of Wilkes. "Lord Halifax observed that he was sorry to see Mr. Wilkes there, for the first time, upon such an occasion;

but that there was the strongest reason to believe that he was the author of the *North Briton*, No. 45; that he would not ask him any questions, the answers to which would tend to accuse himself; yet his duty obliged him to put some questions to him. Mr. Wilkes interrupted his lordship, by saying, that what they knew it would be great impertinence in him to repeat, and what they did not know he should not inform them. Upon which Lord Halifax said, 'Then I suppose we are to understand that you will not answer any questions at all?' Mr. Wilkes said, 'Certainly, my lord; and I thank God I am in a country where there is no torture; and if there was, I hope I have firmness enough to endure it.' He desired their lordships to observe that he was brought there by force; that he had been told the messengers had orders to take him out of his bed in the night; * said it was well they did not, for he had always pistols by his bedside, and would certainly have treated them as ruffians, and been the death of the first man that approached him, though he supposed he should have fallen by the second. He said he would neither acknowledge nor deny being the author of this paper; that the King had not a better subject than himself; that he loved and honoured his Majesty, but detested his Administration, as did every honest man in the kingdom; made some compliments to Lord Halifax and Lord Egremont as gentlemen, but, as Secretaries of State, said he was afraid they had gone too far, and could not justify what they had done; that it was a breach of the privilege of the Commons of Great

* In a marginal note to this account, it is said, "This is a mistake: no such orders were given."

Britain, and if he lived to the first day of the session, which he understood was to be in January, he would stand up in his place and acquaint the House of the whole proceeding. Something about what was to be done with Mr. Wilkes being talked of, Mr. Wilkes said that, however ready he might be to accept of favours from Lord Halifax or Lord Egremont as gentlemen in their private capacities, he desired it to be understood that he asked none, nor would he receive any, from them in their public station; that they were in possession of him by force, and he was their prisoner, and they might do with him as they pleased. He was then ordered to retire, after which his warrant of commitment to the Tower was signed."

As soon as Wilkes had been carried to the Tower, his house was searched; the drawers of his writing-table and other private repositories were broken open, and all the papers found in them were put into a sack and taken to the house of Lord Halifax. This procedure, natural enough in emissaries of a Grand Inquisitor, but extraordinary in the agents of an English Secretary of State, was afterwards defended in a court of justice by men professedly learned in English law, on the ground that, had not this method of issuing and acting upon the General Warrant been pursued, "the evidence which we are in possession of under Mr. Wilkes's own handwriting, proving him to be the author of the libel in question, would, in all probability, not have been in our hands to have been produced against him." Upon the facts becoming publicly known, the indignation against the arbitrary conduct of the Ministry was strong and widespread. Men not disposed to join in the denunciations of the rabble were

as vehement as the incensed mob in blaming the whole proceedings. Mr. Serjeant Hewitt, afterwards Lord Lifford, and Lord Chancellor of Ireland, gave expression to the opinions of moderate and loyal men in these terms:—"This evidence was collected with as much violence, and with as little right by law, as some other collections are made, for which the collectors are hanged when taken."

Scarcely had Wilkes been lodged in the Tower, than a writ of *habeas corpus* from the Court of Common Pleas was served upon two of the King's messengers, Blackmore and Watson. They could not bring the body of John Wilkes before the Court, immediately after the receipt of the writ, for the unanswerable reason that he had been removed out of their custody. Owing to some formalities, which, contrary to the belief at the time, were wholly unavoidable, his arrest was not argued before the Court of Common Pleas till the 6th of May. He contended that, during half the period of his imprisonment, he was kept in solitary confinement at the express orders of Lord Halifax. It was denied that Lord Halifax was privy to this; but that he was kept a close prisoner for three days is an undoubted fact, which tended to increase the wrath of the public against his persecutors. The Court of Common Pleas unanimously ordered his discharge on the technical ground that, as a member of Parliament, he was privileged against arrest for the reason assigned. He made a declamatory address to the court, in which he spoke grandiloquently about liberty in the abstract. His discharge from custody was no proof that the court had any sympathy with what was then styled the cause of

liberty; a cause for which Wilkes had already endured a foretaste of martyrdom. However, he had mortified the law officers of the Crown and the Secretaries of State to an extent which would have enchanted a far vainer man. Their blunders, their inexcusable haste, their unfair animus, made him for the moment a personage whom the people were justified in honouring as a sufferer for the public weal. His demeanour in court was so greatly to the taste of the audience, that Westminster Hall resounded with shouts in his honour. The multitude which thronged the streets welcomed his appearance with still louder exclamations, and escorted him in triumph to his house in Great George Street. At night, houses were illuminated and bonfires blazed to celebrate the liberation of the hero of the hour.

No sooner was he at home again than he penned a letter to the Secretaries of State in concert with his supporter, Earl Temple, and his counsel, Mr. Serjeant Glynn. Lord Temple, who violently disliked Lord Bute, and was then on unfriendly terms with his brother, George Grenville, the Prime Minister, had espoused the part of Wilkes with his whole soul and purse. His solicitor, Mr. Beardmore, had acted professionally when application was made for a writ of *habeas corpus*. Ungainly in person, he had been nicknamed "Lord Gawky." A restless, ambitious intriguer, he delighted in mystery, crooked courses, and bypaths, as other men delight to walk in smooth ways, in the sunshine and amid applause. By none of his contemporaries was he beloved. No man was more liberal in helping a friend with advice when he had a purpose to serve. Walpole writes of him as the familiar at the ears of

Wilkes and Churchill, "whose venom was never distilled at random, but each drop administered to some precious work of mischief . . . who whispered them where they might find torches, but took care never to light one himself. Characters so rash and imprudent were the proper vehicles of his spite, and he enjoyed the two points he preferred even to power—vengeance and a whole skin." * On this occasion, however, his conduct was openly and manly; he publicly supported those he thought injured, and he suffered for so doing. He has been named among the authors of the letters signed Junius. The investigators of that literary puzzle have given but little attention to his claims. Some of them could not do so because they had rashly accepted the theory which would make Junius an obscure clerk in the War Office. Others have been too much engrossed with weighing the claims of contemporory masters of style to give due consideration to the evidence which would render Junius a pseudonyme for the Master of Stowe.

For sympathizing with Wilkes, the King removed Earl Temple from the lord-lieutenancy of Buckinghamshire, appointing Lord Le Despencer in his stead. Before anything had been proved against Wilkes himself, and whilst he was a close prisoner in the Tower under an illegal warrant, the King manifested his displeasure by removing him from the colonelcy of the Bucks Militia. If, in Lord Temple he found an enthusiastic supporter, he had in Mr. Serjeant Glynn a legal adviser of great erudition, tact, and capacity. Writing to Mr. Calcraft, Pitt said:—"Mr. Serjeant Glynn has just left me.

* Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. i. p. 182.

I find him a most ingenious, solid, pleasing man, and the spirit of the constitution itself. I never was more taken by a first conversation in my life." *

The result of the deliberations of Lord Temple, Mr. Serjeant Glynn, and Wilkes was the following letter, which was despatched to the Secretaries of State:— "On my return here from Westminster Hall, where I have been discharged from my commitment to the Tower under your lordships' warrant, I find that my house has been robbed, and am informed that the stolen goods are in the possession of one or both of your lordships. I therefore insist that you do forthwith return them to your humble servant, John Wilkes." On the following morning Wilkes applied, but without success, to the sitting magistrate at Bow Street for a warrant to search the houses of Lord Egremont and Lord Halifax for his stolen goods. In their reply to his letter, the Secretaries of State complain of the "indecent and scurrilous expressions" contained in it; state that, notwithstanding his discharge from the Tower, the King had ordered the Attorney-General to prosecute him; and that they are at a loss to understand what was meant by "stolen goods," adding that "such of your papers as do not lead to a proof of your guilt, shall be restored to you; such as were necessary for that purpose, it was our duty to deliver over to those whose business it is to collect the evidence and manage the prosecution against you." To this a strongly worded retort was written, approved by Mr. Serjeant Glynn, and forwarded to the Secretaries of State. The effect these letters had upon the King and his ministers is shown by the following

* Grenville Papers, vol. ii. p. 61.

communication, forwarded on the 10th of May to the law officers of the Crown :—"Gentlemen, I send you herewith, by the King's express command, copies of two letters written to Lord Egremont and myself by John Wilkes, Esq., M.P. for Aylesbury, and am to desire that you will consider their contents and report your opinion to me for his Majesty's information, whether the writer of such very abusive letters to peers of the realm, and who have the honour to serve the King as his principal Secretaries of State, and to be members of his Majesty's Privy and Cabinet Councils, may not be liable to prosecution and punishment, and, if he shall appear to you to be so, in what manner he may be legally brought to answer for the same. (Signed) Dunk Halifax." This extraordinary document furnishes new and additional evidence of the personal determination of the King to make the alleged author of the *North Briton* feel the weight of his resentment. Wilkes, on his part, was not slow to appeal to the law for redress. He brought actions for false imprisonment, and other offences, against the King's messengers, the Secretaries of State, the Under-Secretary of State, the Solicitor of the Treasury, while the printers, who had also been taken into custody under the General Warrant, did likewise. In these proceedings Earl Temple was the prime mover; his private solicitor conducted the prosecutions, and his lordship defrayed all the expenses.

Had not Earl Temple supported the cause of Wilkes and the printers with his fortune as well as his counsel, the King would not have received a startling and unexpected check in his arbitrary course, and the people might have long remained unguarded by a

fresh security for their independence. The Government did not allow monetary considerations to interfere with the success of its policy. At a meeting of the Commissioners of the Treasury, where Mr. Grenville, First Lord and Chancellor of the Exchequer, presided, the following minute was agreed to:—"Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer signifies to my lords his Majesty's pleasure, that all expenses incurred, or to be incurred, in consequence of actions brought against the Earl of Halifax, one of his Majesty's principal Secretaries of State, the under-secretary and messengers, and the solicitor of this office, for proceedings had by them in executing the business of their respective offices, against the publishers of several scandalous and seditious libels, should be defrayed by the Crown; and that a sufficient sum of money should be, from time to time, issued to the Solicitor of the Treasury for that purpose." Lord Halifax, not trusting to this minute alone, made assurance doubly sure by obtaining a warrant, signed by the Lord Privy Seal, indemnifying him against possible loss in any action for damages which might be instituted relative to these proceedings. Despite the utmost efforts of the Government, the actions against those who had executed the illegal General Warrant were successful; Mr. Wood was cast in damages of £1,000, Lord Halifax of £4,000, while the printers obtained sums varying from £5 up to £200 each. When questioned on the subject, Lord North was reluctantly obliged to avow that the enormous amount of £100,000 represented the legal expenses incurred owing to the issue and operation of this General Warrant.

Nothing could be more emphatic than the language

of Chief-Justice Pratt when characterising the warrant itself in the action tried by him in the case of Mr. Wood. He said :—"Upon the maturest consideration, I am bold to say that this warrant is illegal;" that if it should be decided otherwise by a higher tribunal, "I submit, as will become me, and kiss the rod; but I must say, I shall always consider it as a rod of iron for the chastisement of the people of Great Britain." By this declaration, and others like unto it, Chief-Justice Pratt acquired a popularity as a judge second only in degree and extent to that enjoyed by the Great Commoner as a statesman. His portrait, painted by Reynolds, was placed in Guildhall. Inscribed on it were the words: "In honour of the zealous asserter of English liberty by law." Foreigners who visited London hastened to the Court of Common Pleas in order to see the great judge who had done his duty impartially between the people and the Sovereign at a time when it was only too common to allow a bias to prevail in favour of the Crown.

Hardened and time-serving politicians regarded this judge's conduct as a wonder of the age, and unparalleled in history; they felt as Lord Chesterfield did when he wrote to Lord Stanhope a few years previously:—"There is hardly an instance of any person prosecuted by the Crown, whom the judges have not very partially tried, and, if they could bring it about with the jury, condemned, right or wrong. We have had ship-money judges, dispensing judges, but I never read of any patriot judges, except in the Old Testament, and those, perhaps, were only so because at that time there was no king in Israel." *

* Chesterfield's Correspondence, edited by Lord Mahon, vol. iv. p. 272.

That the King was highly incensed may be readily supposed; that his foolish resentment was nourished by his unconstitutional friends was a matter of course. Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, who, in his judicial capacity, was afterwards obliged to admit that Lord Chief Justice Pratt had rightly interpreted the law, was one of the first to make the King think that pronouncing a General Warrant illegal, was improperly to circumscribe his power. Mr. Grenville records in his Diary the shameful conduct and the disgraceful language of Lord Mansfield:—"The King told Mr. Grenville that Lord Mansfield had been with him, speaking with the warmest zeal for his service; that he had told his Majesty that he should not declare it in public, but that he should tell his Majesty that, according to his opinion, no man had ever behaved so shamefully as Lord Chief Justice Pratt had done; that Lord Chief Justice Jeffries had not acted with greater violence than he, for he had denied his Majesty that justice which every petty justice of the peace would have granted to a highwayman." *

Believing that the demand for complete sets of the *North Briton* would be increased by the notoriety of No. 45, Wilkes determined upon carrying out his design of reprinting the work, and as he could not get a printer who would risk his liberty by doing so, he had a printing-press established in his own house. Against this project Earl Temple remonstrated in the strongest manner, but in vain. He even went the length of saying that if Wilkes would relinquish the scheme he would pay any sum of money that might be named. The anticipations of Earl Temple

* Grenville Papers, vol. ii. p. 239.

were verified by the result. When Wilkes was afterwards convicted in a court of justice, his legal offence was that of reprinting No. 45: the only witnesses against him were the printers he employed; that he was the author of the paper was never legally proved. He made use of his private press to print other papers, some of which were distributed as hand-bills, and one was designed for private and very limited circulation. The latter consisted of an *Essay on Woman*, being an indecent parody on Pope's *Essay on Man*, and other pieces in the same strain. The verses, composed by Mr. Potter, had given entertainment to the infamous monks of Medmenham Abbey.* Foot-notes, attributed to Bishop Warburton, were appended to the verses. A copper-plate illustration, not more decent than the lines and the notes, was prefixed to the work, of which not more than thirteen copies were printed.

As soon as the *North Briton* had been reprinted, Wilkes went to Paris to see his daughter. When walking in the streets of Paris in company with Lord Palmerston, he was accosted by a Captain Forbes, a

* The "Essay on Woman" is an episode in the career of Wilkes which would have been discussed at length in the text had not the subject been exhaustively treated by Mr. Dilke, in three papers in *Notes and Queries*, for 1857. The conclusions of Mr. Dilke are the same as those at which I had arrived by independent investigation. To these papers the reader who desires further particulars is referred. Suffice it here to state the conclusions themselves. First, no evidence was offered in the Court of King's Bench proving Wilkes to have been the author; he was found guilty, fined and imprisoned for printing and publishing the "Essay," the printing having been conducted with every precaution as to secrecy, and the publishing consisting in a copy being stolen and read before the House of Peers by Lord Sandwich. Second, the evidence proving Potter, the son of the Archbishop of Canterbury, to be the author is overwhelming. Third, a manuscript copy in the handwriting of Wilkes is supposed to be in existence; but no one since his condemnation has proved that he had seen a copy of the printed original, nor is such a copy known to be extant.

Scotchman in the French service, and challenged to fight a duel for having written against Scotland. An appointment was made for the following day to settle preliminaries; but this had no result, owing to the absence of a second to represent Captain Forbes. In the afternoon of that day Wilkes was put under arrest, and soon after he was visited by Mr. Macdonald, another Scottish gentleman in the French service, who assured him in the name of the Scots residing in Paris that Captain Forbes's behaviour had not their sympathy, and was regarded by them as the mere rashness of a foolish young man. Mr. Croker, whose extreme Tory views rendered him indisposed to see anything to approve in a man who was no favourite at Court, gives it as his opinion that, in this affair "on the whole, it is impossible to deny that Captain Forbes's conduct was hasty and foolish, and that Wilkes behaved himself like a man of temper and honour."* Captain Forbes was not seen again till some time afterwards, when he reappeared in London. Lord Sandwich wrote a letter desiring him to embark for Portugal, which he did, and on arriving there, he was taken into the Portuguese service, and rose to be a general in the army of Portugal. Mr. Almon says this gave rise to a suspicion that Captain Forbes's conduct had the approbation of some person in power. The person in power who did approve of it must have been very strangely constituted, and very easily pleased.

Wilkes returned to London, and was present in the House of Commons when Parliament re-assembled on the 15th of November. He took the earliest oppor-

* Footnote to Walpole's Letters, vol. iv. p. 126.

tunity to rise in his place and complain of a breach of privilege, a matter which, by the invariable usage of the House, takes precedence over all other business. Mr. Grenville was ready, however, with a message from the King, and the House manifested its courtly predilections by deciding to hear the royal message first.* The message contained a recital of all the proceedings which had been taken against Wilkes; a vote of thanks was returned for sending it. Lord North, who had most unwillingly undertaken the invidious duty, then rose and moved,† "That the paper entitled the *North Briton*, No. 45, is a false, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing expressions of the most unexampled insolence and contumely towards his Majesty, the grossest aspersions upon both Houses of Parliament, and the most audacious defiance of the authority of the whole Legislature; and most manifestly tending to alienate the affections of the people from his Majesty, to withdraw them from their obedience to the laws of the realm, and to excite them to traitorous insurrections against his Majesty's Government."

Anyone who now reads this portentous resolution, after having perused the incriminated number, must think that its framers and approvers either used words in a non-natural sense, or else put a signification

* When William Pitt was battling in 1784 to uphold the Administration of which he was the head, he endeavoured, but in vain, to obtain precedence in debate by stating that he had a royal message to deliver.—*Parliamentary History*, vol. xxiv. p. 270.

† On the 31st of October, Lord Halifax wrote to Mr. Grenville saying that Lord North, after inclining to vote the *North Briton*, No. 45, scandalous and seditious, desired to recede from the undertaking, concluding his letter with these words, "Don't show Lord North this letter, nor take notice of your having seen it; but do what you can to fix him in the part he agreed to take in Wilkes' affair, and I will do the same."—*Grenville Papers*, vol. ii., p. 152.

upon the words themselves differing from that of other men. A paper characterized as seditious, insolent, full of aspersions upon Parliament, tending to bring the King into contempt, and raise the people in armed insurrection, ought to be a document of no ordinary virulence, asperity, and power. Yet the following are the passages which the Attorney-General selected and emphasized as the very worst that could be found:—

"The *King's speech* has always been considered by the legislature and by the public at large as the *speech of the Minister.* It has regularly, at the beginning of every session of Parliament, been referred by both Houses to the consideration of a committee, and has been generally canvassed with the utmost freedom when the Minister of the Crown has been obnoxious to the nation. . . . This week has given the public the most abandoned instance of ministerial effrontery ever attempted to be imposed on mankind. The *Ministers' speech* of last Tuesday is not to be paralleled in the annals of this country. I am in doubt whether the imposition is greater on the Sovereign or on the nation. Every friend of his country must lament that a prince of so many great and amiable qualities, whom England truly reveres, can be brought to give the sanction of his sacred name to the most odious measures, and to the most unjustifiable public declarations, from a throne ever renowned for truth, honour, and unsullied virtue."

This certainly is plain speaking; the language is strong and sarcastic, but to style it seditious and traitorous is simply to utter nonsense. Statements quite as vehement and abusive have been made respecting a speech from the throne, both before

and after the time of Wilkes, without exciting more than a passing remark, and without subjecting those who made them to any charge of disloyalty or treason. When discussing the King's speech on the subject of the Falkland Islands, Lord Chatham said something infinitely more personal and severe than the bitterest sentences of Wilkes. He told the House of Lords, "there never was a more odious, a more infamous falsehood imposed on a great nation. It degrades the King; it insults the Parliament. His Majesty has been advised to affirm an absolute falsehood. My lords, I beg your attention, and I hope I shall be understood when I repeat that it is an absolute, a palpable falsehood."

The truth is that Wilkes was prosecuted, not so much on account of No. 45, but because the opposition of the *North Briton* to the measures of the Court had been alike obnoxious and effective, and because he had employed the power of the Press to counteract the licence of the Crown. That he might speak in Parliament what he had written and published was permissible, inasmuch as the Parliamentary debates, being virtually unreported, produced no impression upon the people. But it was accounted intolerable that freedom of discussion in print should be claimed and exercised by a declared opponent to the Ministry of the day; consequently, all the influence of the Government was used to crush and chastise the offender.

The attempt to proceed against him under a General Warrant having failed, the King and his subservient Ministers had recourse to their venal majority in the House of Commons. By a minority, in which Pitt

was the conspicuous figure, the attack upon free and full discussion was valiantly denounced and resisted. Pitt addressed the House no less than forty times during the debate. Wilkes made a temperate and becoming explanatory speech. He conducted himself with a coolness which was in striking contrast to the fury of his adversaries. An eye-witness relates that "Mr. Wilkes, with all the impartiality in the world, and with the phlegm of an Areopagite, sat and heard the whole matter discussed, and now and then put in a word, as if the whole affair did not concern him."* Yet arguments proved wholly impotent against numbers, and the ministerial majority carried not only Lord North's disgraceful resolution, but also another, ordering that the obnoxious paper should be publicly burned by the common hangman.

These proceedings were most irritating and unwelcome to the nation at large. When the common hangman was about to execute the order of the House of Commons, he was forcibly prevented from committing a copy of No. 45 to the flames; a petticoat and a jack-boot, symbolizing the King's mother and Lord Bute, being burned in its stead. Williams, one of the journeyman printers employed to reprint the *North Briton*, having been sentenced to the pillory, went to the place of punishment in a coach marked No. 45. The spectators treated him as a martyr; cheered, instead of pelting him with missiles; made a collection for him which produced £200, and suspended from a temporary gallows a boot and a Scotch bonnet in derision of the supposed instigator of the proceedings. Whenever Wilkes appeared in public and was

* Walpole to Sir Horace Mann, Correspondence, vol. iv. p. 131.

recognised, he was hailed with loud huzzas. At great City banquets it became the custom to give as a toast, "Wit, Beauty, Virtue, Honour," these being, as Walpole records, "ironic designations of the King, Queen, Princess-Dowager, and Lord Bute."

In addition to persuading the House of Commons to pass a violent censure upon Wilkes for his alleged connection with the *North Briton* as a preliminary to expelling him, the Government instigated the House of Lords to proceed against him on another and very different charge. Among the papers illegally seized at Kearsley's, his publisher, were some letters from him referring to an *Essay on Woman* for which a copper-plate illustration had been made. It is possible that the manuscript of that "Essay" was found among these papers, or among those in Wilkes's house. Certain it is that, when thirteen copies of this work were being printed at the private press in Great George Street, with all possible precautions as to secrecy, a portion of the proof sheets of the thirteenth copy was abstracted by Michael Curry, the head printer, and, after having been read by several persons, came into the possession of the Rev. Mr. Kidgell, chaplain to the Earl of March.

Lord March, afterwards notorious as the Duke of Queensberry, was nearly as vicious and abandoned at this period as at a later one; his vices ripened fully in youth. His chaplain was a suitable associate for him. He wrote an essay in prose, purporting to be an outline of the poem, which was acknowledged to be the more infamous of the two. His despicable service in suborning the printer was rewarded by the living of Godstone, in Surrey. After holding it for a time he visited the

Continent, and transferred his piety and virtue to the service of the Church of Rome. The loss of such a servant was no small gain to the Church of England.*

Lord March having communicated his acquisition to the Government, he was implored to exert himself to obtain a complete copy. The Rev. Mr. Kidgell performed this duty, bribing Michael Curry to steal one, which was delivered over to Lord Sandwich, then Secretary of State. Curry was carried by Mr. Webb, solicitor to the Treasury, before Lord Sandwich, who said to him, "You have saved the nation, and you may depend on anything that is in my power." Lord Sandwich took the printed poem to Bishop Warburton, the result of their conference being communicated to Mr. Grenville, by letter, in the following terms:—"I have this morning been with the bishop, and have showed him the papers. He comes heartily into the affair; says he will not only authorize me to complain in his name of this outrage, but will take any part in it himself that shall be judged proper by the King's administration; and he seems much pleased with the scheme in general." Lord Sandwich was in his element; he was revelling in an intrigue and indecency. As a leading member of the Government, he was anxious to show his zeal and loyalty by crushing Wilkes, while he was quite as anxious to gratify his thirst for vengeance upon the man who once threw him into a frenzy of terror, and made him atone for an ostentatious disbelief in God by a momentary belief in the Devil.

While Lord North was engaged in moving his resolution in the House of Commons, Lord Sandwich, with

* Stephens's Memoirs of Horne Tooke, vol. i., p. 100.

undissembled gusto, read aloud the *Essay on Woman* in the House of Lords. The assembled peers were shocked; Lord Hardwicke appealed to him not to continue to the end. With the poem, as a whole, the House had no concern, for the complaint made was that a breach of privilege had been committed by attaching the name of the Lord Bishop of Gloucester to certain notes appended to the poem. But Lord Sandwich would not forego the satisfaction of tormenting his hearers. As soon as the noble profligate and Minister of State had played his vile part, his accomplice, Bishop Warburton, rose, and with well-feigned surprise and indignation, protested against the ears of himself and of his episcopal brethren being polluted with such filth, and volunteered the prediction that "the blackest fiends in hell" would not keep company with Wilkes when he should arrive there. He assumed that Wilkes was the author, little suspecting that the verses had been penned by Potter, the reputed gallant of his wife. He pronounced the poem "worthy of the Devil," adding, after a pause, "No, I beg the Devil's pardon: he is incapable of writing it." This language was open to one retort, which was, that it unduly circumscribed the power of Satan, and to another, which Wilkes afterwards made in the following terms: "He remembers the caution of the wary Spaniard, who always said, 'my good lord, the Devil,' that he might in all events be in favour below. A few years ago, the bishop published a treatise upon Grace, or the office and operation of the Holy Spirit, in the preface to which he says, 'I have a Master above, and I have one below.' Lord Bute has been his Master above; is

the person whose pardon he begged, his Master below?"*

Six months after this unnatural and scandalous compact between Sandwich and Warburton, the latter applied to Mr. Grenville to be translated to the Bishopric of London, then vacant, urging that he had "nothing to support his pretensions but an unfeigned zeal for the service of religion, and of his royal master." His royal master, however, thought as lightly of his Christianity as others, whose views Mrs. Montagu expressed when she thus wrote concerning his defence of the Christian faith: "The levity shocks me, the indecency displeases me, the *grossièreté* disgusts me."† Warburton's real temper was manifested upon Terrick being preferred before him as Bishop of London. Preaching in the royal chapel during the King's illness in 1765, he contrasted Terrick with himself, picturing his rival as demerit improperly favoured, and himself as merit shamefully slighted and unappreciated.‡ No prelate on the bench should have been more reluctant than he to complain of his name being used without permission; for, when editing the *Dunciad*, he wrote an introduction and notes in the name of Bentley, solely with the view to bring the great scholar into contempt, and to wreak his spite upon him. Walpole called him that "scurrilous mortal." Bolingbroke declared that discussion with him would be as degrading as to "wrestle with a chimney-sweep." It is difficult to determine whether Warburton's conduct or that of Lord Sandwich was the more culpable and blameworthy. Though hypocrisy is not criminal in law, and is legally

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. iii., p. 80.
† A Lady of the Last Century, p. 85.
‡ Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. ii. p. 84.

less blameworthy than theft, yet a bishop who makes hypocrisy an instrument for advancement, is morally more censurable than a Secretary of State who steals by deputy, in order to punish a political opponent. When the disgraceful proceedings in the House of Lords were communicated to Pitt, he warmly reprobated all who took part in them, and exclaimed, "Why do not they search the Bishop of Gloucester's study for heresy?"

The treachery and audacity of Lord Sandwich astounded his old comrade and rival in wickedness, Sir Francis Dashwood, now Lord Le Despencer, who, lifting up his hands in amazement, said he had "never before heard the Devil preach a sermon against sin." By the public at large this attempt to act as a censor upon Wilkes was regarded as a fresh confirmation of Sandwich's profligacy. The *Beggar's Opera* being played at this time, when Macheath uttered the words, "But that Jemmy Twitcher should peach, I own surprises me," the entire audience applied them to Sandwich, and he received the nickname of Jemmy Twitcher by common consent. Shortly afterwards he was expelled from the Beefsteak Club for blasphemy. Five years later, when judgment was pronounced in the Douglas Case, he signalised himself as he had done in the case of Wilkes, speaking for three hours, and "scandalized the bishops, having, with his usual industry, studied even the midwifery of the case, which he retailed with very little decency." * He disgraced himself in another way when there was a prospect of war with America; he confidently alleged that the rebellious colonists were rank cowards. Among jobbers he had

* Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's edition, vol. iii. p. 303.

few equals; he had the daring, when First Lord of the Admiralty, to provide landsmen who were electors for the county of Huntingdonshire with the places, in Greenwich Hospital, solely intended for seamen who had fought and bled on behalf of their country.

Yet none of his misdeeds alienated the affection of George the Third. The King respected a Minister who would go any length to serve him; this was enough; no vice could mar so admirable a disposition. Late in life the King, recapitulating the names of the First Lords of the Admiralty he liked the best,—Lord Egmont, Lord Howe, Lord Spencer, and Lord St. Vincent,—said that "he valued Lord Sandwich above them all."* Hardly any Minister had ever done more to ingratiate himself at Court in the way most successful when George the Third was on the throne; for when Parliament was requested in 1769 to pay the King's debts, the amount being £513,000, "Lord Sandwich made a mockery of unanimity, and desired to see who would vote against a measure that was personal to his Majesty."† It is not strange, then, that for nearly twenty years he was one of the King's favourite ministers. That his bad moral character and his contemptible servility alone recommended him for office, it would be unjust to maintain. The Sovereign was not the only person of unblemished morality who took pleasure in his company. Charles Butler has left a sketch of him which proves that he was something better than a mere rake, and it proves also that he was not a little of a pretender:—"Lord Sandwich might serve as a model for a man of business.

* Diaries of the Right Honourable George Rose, vol. ii. p. 163.
† Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's edition, vol. iii. p. 343.

He rose early, and, till a late dinner, dedicated his whole time to business: he was very methodical; slow, not wearisome; cautious, not suspicious; rather a man of sense than a man of talent; he had much real good-nature; his promises might be relied on. His manners partook of the old court; and he possessed, in a singular degree, the art of attaching persons of every rank to him. Few houses were more pleasant or instructive than his lordship's; it was filled with rank, beauty, and talent, and every one was at ease. He professed to be fond of music, and musicians flocked to him; he was the soul of the Catch Club, and one of the directors of the Concert of Ancient Music; but (which is the case of more than one noble and more than one gentle amateur) he had not the least real ear for music, and was equally insensible of harmony and melody." * Though no admirer of Sandwich, yet Walpole confirms all that is favourable in the foregoing account: "No man in the administration was so much master of business, so quick or so shrewd, and no man had so many public enemies who had so few private; for though void of principles, he was void of rancour, and bore with equal good humour the freedom with which his friends attacked him, and the satire of his opponents." † Of his external appearance, Fanny Burney has left this sketch made by her when a girl: "Lord Sandwich is a tall, stout man, and looks as furrowed and weather-proof as any sailor in the navy; and, like most of the old set of that brave tribe, he has good-nature and joviality marked in every feature." ‡ This sketch is quite

* Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i. p. 72.
† Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iv. p. 257.
‡ Memoirs of Dr. Burney by Madame d'Arblay, vol. ii. p. 64.

impartial, because its author was ignorant of the worst trait in his character. She expressed a desire to know "why he is called Jemmy Twitcher in the newspapers?"

The act which gave him his nickname was entirely successful. Alone among the peers, Lords Sandys and Temple expostulated with the Minister for using papers, surreptitiously obtained, to the prejudice of an individual, and employing, as corroborative evidence, other papers obtained under a General Warrant held to be illegal. Indecency in verse, the Peers disliked; in action, they thought it natural. At the bidding of the Minister, they voted that the poem was a breach of privilege, and that Wilkes was its author. Failing to bring him before them for punishment, it was ordered that he should be prosecuted by the Attorney-General in the Court of King's Bench for having printed and published an impious libel. Of incontrovertible evidence proving him the author of the poem, not a tittle was supplied.

Supposing Wilkes to have written any of the other parodies on Pope, his personal vindication is contained in a letter to his constituents at Aylesbury:— "I should be superior to entering into any justification of myself, because I will always maintain the right of private opinion in its fullest extent, when it is not followed by any open, public offence to any establishment, or, indeed, to any individual. The crime commences from this point; and the magistrate has then a right to interfere, and even to punish outrageous attacks upon what any community has decreed to be sacred. Not only the rules of good-breeding, but the laws of society are then infringed. In my

own closet I had a right to examine, and even to try by the keen edge of ridicule, any opinions I pleased. If I have laughed pretty freely at the glaring absurdities of a creed which our great Tillotson wished that the Church of England was fairly rid of, it was in private I laughed. I gave no offence to any one individual of the community. The fact is, that, after the affair of the *North Briton*, the Government bribed one of my servants to steal a part of the 'Essay on Woman,' and the other pieces, out of my house. Not quite a fourth part of the volume had been printed at my own private press. The work had been discontinued for several months, before I had the least knowledge of the theft. Of that fourth part only twelve copies were worked off, and I never gave one of those copies to any friend. In this infamous manner did Government get possession of this new subject of accusation; and, except in the case of Algernon Sidney, of this new species of crime."

Mr. Grenville sent the King a minute account of the debate in the House of Commons relative to the *North Briton*, and received in return a letter of thanks, containing the following sentence:—"Your account of the meeting last night gives me well-grounded hopes that everything in Parliament will go well; the continuance of Wilkes' impudence is amazing, when his ruin is so near." In the course of that debate an incident occurred which might have ended in the premature death of the man whom the King detested, and whose approaching ruin he foretold. After Wilkes had addressed the House, Mr. Martin, an ex-Secretary of the Treasury, rose and upbraided him in opprobrious terms, adding that the

author of the *North Briton* "was a malignant and infamous scoundrel, who had stabbed him in the dark." Mr. Martin, who was notoriously the subordinate instrument of Henry Fox for corrupting the House of Commons, had been mentioned in merited and most uncomplimentary terms in the *North Briton* eight months previously. He spent the interval in nursing his wrath and acquiring skill as a pistol shot. The duel for which he had assiduously prepared himself now took place, and Wilkes received a bullet in his stomach. A rumour circulated that he had been killed, and many partisans of the Ministry congratulated themselves upon the good riddance which was the result of Mr. Martin's deliberate action. However, the wound, though dangerous, was not mortal. The House of Commons took so much interest in his condition, and were so much dissatisfied with the slowness of his recovery, as to order two medical men to attend him, but he refused to see them, and summoned two Scotchmen, Duncan and Middleton. His doctors told him that he must keep quiet, avoid excitement, and not see company; he assured them that he would obey their injunctions, and not see even his own wife.

Alexander Dun, a Scot, attempted to force his way into his house, with the intention, as was supposed, of murdering him in revenge for having satirized his countrymen. The evidence of a criminal intent was very weak. He was tried and acquitted, on the ground that he evidently was more intent upon vapouring than upon committing murder.

Parliament adjourned for the Christmas holidays, without taking further steps against Wilkes, and he,

having sufficiently recovered to travel, went to Paris for change of air and scene. His wound breaking out afresh, he was unable to start for London before Parliament re-assembled. He sent a medical certificate to the Speaker, in which two eminent French doctors testified as to his critical condition; but this was deemed unsatisfactory by the House, on the ground that it had not been sworn before a notary. That the pretext was frivolous was proved by the majority refusing to grant time during which to comply with the formality held to be indispensable. Indeed, the majority were too anxious to use their power to care anything for decency and fair play.

A letter written by Lord Barrington to Mr. Mitchell seven days previously, furnishes conclusive proof that no consideration was to be extended towards one whom the Ministry and the Court had combined to extinguish. He says, "I do not expect opposition from Mr. Pitt when the Parliament reassembles; and all other opposition is *brutum fulmen*. Wilkes will be demolished whether he comes home or stays abroad, and I think Government will recover vigour and dignity, both of which it has greatly wanted in respect to its foreign and domestic relations." *

Accordingly, on the 19th of January, 1764, Wilkes was expelled for having written what, by a vote of the House, was held to be "a scandalous and seditious libel." No conclusive proof of his having been the author of the *North Briton*, No. 45, had been offered to Parliament; no conviction had been recorded against him in a court of law. The crime was first

* Quoted from the Mitchell MSS., in a footnote to Chatham Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 271.

alleged, then punished, on the one-sided statement of a Minister of the Crown. A more tyrannical exercise of power was rare even in those days, when the bulwarks of liberty were neither numerous nor staunch. But, as the King had predicted, his ruin was near; the King's friends had conspired to rid him of a dreaded opponent.

On the 21st of the succeeding month, he was tried in the Court of King's Bench, and found guilty of republishing No. 45, and of printing and publishing that *Essay on Woman* which he had carefully concealed in his desk, which had been stolen therefrom by an agent of the Government, and made public for the first and only time by Lord Sandwich in the House of Lords. As he did not appear in Court at the trial, sentence was deferred; and as he continued to absent himself, he was outlawed. Thus, to all appearance, his ruin was finally accomplished, and the King triumphant.

Yet, though no longer present in the flesh to stir up, or be the pretext for strife, he had not altogether ceased to give trouble to the Government, and to cause personal anxiety to the King. A spectre had been raised which disquieted every friend of the Constitution, whether overflowing with sympathy for Wilkes or filled with abhorrence of his conduct. In the power to issue and act upon a General Warrant—that is a warrant to apprehend and imprison any one whom the bearer suspected of being guilty, or of participation in the guilt of a vaguely defined offence,—the most learned constitutional lawyers and the simplest country gentlemen beheld the germs of a tyranny as grinding and intolerable as anything for which their

forefathers had denounced Tudor or Stuart, and had risked their lives to resist. It was neither defence nor palliation to urge, as was earnestly and shamefully urged by the servile worshippers of the Crown, that the right to issue such warrants was sanctioned by precedents, and justified by results. After the 3rd of May, 1695, any act done by virtue of a General Warrant, in restraint of the liberty of the Press, was utterly arbitrary and illegal. The Lord Chief Justice of the Common Pleas went so far as to stigmatise all such instruments as "unconstitutional, illegal, and absolutely void." It was proved, beyond all doubt, that the Duke of Newcastle and Pitt had availed themselves of these convenient forms of despotism to uphold the principles of freedom. Their excuse was that they had acted on that necessity which, as Lord Eldon loved to maintain at a later day, was more imperious than any law; and which William Pitt, in one of his earliest speeches, truly characterized as "the plea for every infringement of human freedom. It was the argument of tyrants: it was the creed of slaves." * To make a divinity of precedent, and to hold that a particular act is legalized by the frequency of its unlawful repetition, is a common practice of British lawyers; a practice which has led to the establishment of many legal scarecrows which mere lawyers treat with profound respect, and men of sense with contempt and ridicule.

When Sir William Meredith moved that General Warrants were illegal, he encountered a determined resistance from the Ministry, for this was equivalent to a condemnation of the entire proceedings against the proprietor of the *North Briton*. Many of their

* Pitt's Speeches, vol. i. p. 91.

habitual supporters could not deny that the warrant was bad in law, and detestable in principle. Some of them held places under Government or at Court, among whom were three colonels, Conway, Barré, and A'Court. They were ready to go great lengths in obedience to the King; they had voted for the expulsion of Wilkes untried and unconvicted, but they shrank from giving to the Ministry a power as uncontrolled as that exercised by any Persian despot. Remembering that one of the reasons for expelling Wilkes was that he had cast aspersions upon Parliament, it is startling to find Sir Fletcher Norton, the Solicitor-General, and the most thorough-going defender of General Warrants, sneer at any resolution condemnatory of them, and bluntly tell the House, without being called to order by the Speaker, "If I were a Judge, I should pay no more regard to this resolution than to that of a drunken porter." Well might Walpole write to the Earl of Hertford, that had "old Onslow been in the Chair, I believe he would have knocked him down with the mace." * Charles Townshend, though anxious to be in favour with the Court, and bearing no friendship for Wilkes, was yet obliged to protest most emphatically against the dictum of Norton, and to point out that "one advantage had been derived from Wilkes; he had stopped a growing evil. Nobody could think what thirty years more might have done. This warrant, without description of person, might take up any man under any description of libel." † The debate was as protracted as it was acrimonious. Two nights were

* Letters of Horace Walpole, Cunningham's edition, vol. iv. p. 190.
† Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. i. p. 378.

devoted to it, the House sitting on the first of them for seventeen successive hours before adjourning. Every available voter was brought down to support the Ministry or the Opposition; the spectacle of the halt and the sick swathed in flannels encumbering the floor, reminding the not too reverent Walpole of the inspired account of the Pool of Bethesda. Fearing defeat on the main issue, the Ministry escaped direct censure by moving an amendment to postpone the debate for four months. This was carried by a majority unprecedentedly small in those days, the numbers being 232 to 218. The King, with the respect for free and honest discussion he invariably displayed, determined to punish those who, having any place in his service, had voted in the minority. He could not, —so he wrote to Mr. Grenville with regard to Conway, one of the honest men,—trust his army "in the hands of a man who votes in Parliament against him." George the Third detested to see others act independently, as much as he spurned any restriction on his own freedom.

Upon Wilkes learning that he had been expelled from the House of Commons, he considered it prudent to fix his residence abroad, and in this resolution he was confirmed by the verdict of guilty found against him in the Court of King's Bench. He fairly argued that, should he appear to receive sentence, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, whose courtly sycophancy was notorious, might inflict upon him the heaviest punishment in his power. Nor could he feel certain of finding in popular enthusiasm an adequate compensation for judicial severity and royal malevolence. Writing from Paris on the 20th of January, 1764, to his friend,

Mr. Humphrey Cotes, in whose hands he had placed his private affairs, in whom he implicitly trusted, but who appears to have been, what he has been styled, an accomplished swindler, he says: "I have in my own case experienced the fickleness of the people. I was almost adored one week; the next, neglected, abused, and despised." He was in great straits for money. He had always been a spendthrift. Had it not been for the generosity of some members of the Liberal Opposition, with the Marquess of Rockingham at their head, he would soon have been unable to procure the very necessaries of life. However, these sympathisers with his misfortunes put him in possession of a sum wherewith to live abroad in comfort, the total contribution amounting to an income of 1000*l.* a year. They thought it better, alike for him and for their party, that he should not return to England, and were highly gratified when they learned that he had decided upon going to Italy and making a sojourn there.

He started for Italy in the spring of 1765. His letters to his daughter contain a full account of his journeyings; few of the particulars, however, have retained their interest. An exception is his account of the Festival of St. Januarius, given in a letter from Naples on the 7th of May, 1765; now that miracles have become frequent and fashionable, it is curious to read how a famous one was performed about a century ago: "Last Saturday I assisted at the great festival which is kept twice a year here. It is on occasion of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, the patron of the kingdom of Naples. All the nobility and the people were

assembled. There was a very fine concert performed in the church where this miracle was to be performed. A cardinal came in great pomp, dressed in his scarlet robes; and soon after was brought a glass case, containing two crystal phials. These were held up to the people. I stood on the steps of the altar, and saw in the largest a thick red substance, which looked like coagulated blood. In the smaller phial was a substance not so thick. After the glass case containing the phial had been held up for some time, it was brought near a head of the saint, made of brass, but having a large mitre entirely covered with jewels and precious stones. The cardinal then repeated several prayers in Latin, and kept turning about the glass case for about twenty minutes; when, on a sudden, bowing to the people, he cried out, 'The miracle is done,' in Italian, and the multitude seemed frantic with joy, the women especially. A little before they were grown mad with impatience, and began to tear their hair, beat their breasts, and make furious howlings, *praying* God to *pray* St. Januarius to perform the miracle. If the miracle does not happen (in the Neapolitan phrase), the people here expect some dreadful disaster. After the liquefaction, the cardinal (on his knees), the Imperial ambassador, &c., &c., kissed the relic with great devotion. The people now think themselves safe against Vesuvius, and all other dangers, for six months at least. I should have mentioned that a sacred oratorio is performed in the church just before the liquefaction, the book of which was given me. There are three persons introduced in this oratorio,—God Almighty, Religion, and the City of Naples." *

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 164.

During his stay in Naples, Wilkes projected a History of England from the time of the Revolution, and a biography of his friend Churchill, who had died suddenly at Boulogne a year previously, as well as an annotated edition of his works. He was ambitious to justify the reputation he had gained as a writer. In a letter to Mr. Cotes he announces that he "will never risk any crudities with the public," and he adds a reflection resembling that which Bentley expressed in the apophthegm which Dr. Johnson was fond of repeating: "No man who had any reputation, was ever wrote out of it but by himself." Writing to Mr. Almon, with whom he had arranged for the publication of his History, he promises to take care that his "first volume shall make the nation wild for the rest of the work." This proved to be an entire miscalculation; he never produced anything except an introductory chapter, which was the reverse of sensational. The notes to Churchill's poems were disappointing. Wilkes was a better journalist than an author.

At this time his political prospects had improved. The King had finally succeeded in getting rid of George Grenville, during whose Administration Wilkes had been prosecuted. The King himself had suffered what he considered persecution at the hands of his Prime-Minister. The latter was an intolerable proser, and the former an impatient listener. "When Mr. Grenville has wearied me for two hours, he looks at his watch to see if he may not tire me for an hour more," was the pathetic complaint of the King. To such a pitch had the King's aversion risen that he told Lord Hertford: "I would sooner meet Grenville at the point of the sword than let him into my closet," and

he expressed the same thought in even more emphatic language when he said to Colonel Fitzroy: "I would rather see the Devil in my closet than Mr. Grenville."

From the Administration of Lord Rockingham, which succeeded that of George Grenville, and was nicknamed by Charles Townshend the "Lutestring Administration," Wilkes expected some substantial favour as a recompense for his struggles and trials. But, receiving nothing more than a private donation from the pockets of the new Ministers, he was bitterly disappointed, and wrote, "You can never trust any ministers in our country. The Whigs in power turn Tories; though, alas! the Tories in power do not turn Whigs." Yet this Ministry did not altogether merit such a reproach. They procured the repeal of the Stamp Act, introduced in a moment of culpable thoughtlessness by Mr. Grenville, with the view of increasing the revenue of Great Britain, and with the result of exciting an outbreak in the American Colonies. At their instance, the House of Commons took into consideration the subject of General Warrants. The argument against them could not logically be evaded since Lord Halifax had pleaded privilege of peerage in an action for damages brought against him by Wilkes. Sir William Meredith forcibly said, "If they who issued the warrants, had put themselves on the justice of their country, it would have alleviated their guilt, but while the privilege of the House of Commons was given up, the privilege of the other House interfered to stop justice." By a large majority the Commons now decided that General Warrants, as well as all acts done in virtue of them, were illegal, and, in the case of a member of Parliament, constituted

breaches of privilege. Thus the aim of Wilkes received Parliamentary approval, while the nation was relieved from all apprehension of free discussion in the Press being again impeded by Ministers exercising arbitrary and irresponsible authority.

Unable to maintain his ground against the subtle opposition of the King and the King's friends, Lord Rockingham resigned, and was succeeded by the famous and fatal mosaic Administration in which Chatham was the most conspicuous member, and the Duke of Grafton was the First Lord of the Treasury Never has Walpole's prescience been so marked than in what he wrote to Mr. Montague immediately before this Administration was formed: "The plan will probably be to pick and cull from all quarters, and break all parties as much as possible. From this moment I date the wane of Mr. Pitt's glory; he will want the thorough bass of drums and trumpets, and is not made for peace."

Wilkes presumed upon an intimate personal acquaintance with the Duke of Grafton to solicit his aid to obtain a pardon. To such a request, he believed that Chatham would not object. In a letter to the Duke, he said: "I have had as warm and express declarations of regard as could be made by this marble-hearted friend (Pitt); and Mr. Pitt had, no doubt, his views in even feeding me with flattery from time to time; on occasions, too, where candour and indulgence were all I could claim." This letter was written in London whither he had come, notwithstanding his outlawry, at the suggestion, as he alleged, of Colonel Fitzroy, the Duke of Grafton's brother. The reply was a verbal message to the effect, "I can do nothing

without Lord Chatham. Mr. Wilkes must write to Lord Chatham." Immediately after receiving this, Wilkes ordered a post-chaise, and started for the Continent.*

At the beginning of March, 1768, he again returned to London without any attempt at concealment, and forwarded a petition for pardon to the King. No answer was returned. Yet the Ministers were now as anxious as himself that the pardon should be granted; the King, however, was not only inexorable, but expressed his displeasure at the request being preferred. The Bishop of Carlisle, in a letter to Mr. Grenville, thus depicts the position of the Grafton administration: "The Ministers are embarrassed to the last degree how to act with regard to Wilkes. It seems they are afraid to press the King for his pardon, as that is a subject his Majesty will not easily hear the least mention of; and they are apprehensive, if he has it not, that the mob of London will rise in his favour, which God forbid."†

Parliament having been dissolved, Wilkes conceived the bold stroke of coming forward as a candidate to represent the City of London. He issued an address, attended meetings of the electors, and was most flatteringly received. The excitement took the thoroughly

* Entries in the private note-book of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was a constant friend of Wilkes and his family, make it appear as if Wilkes had more than once visited London incognito. It is possible, however, that some of the references to visits paid by Sir Joshua with special precautions as to secrecy, relate to his brother, Mr. Heaton Wilkes, whose ill-success in business may have led him to live in a retired way so as to escape from his creditors. Whether Wilkes frequently visited London or not during his outlawry is a matter of too slight consequence to merit discussion. See the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, by Mr. Leslie and Mr. Tom Taylor, vol. i., pp. 237 and 258.

† Grenville Papers, vol. iii. p. 241.

national form of betting upon the chances of his return. Walpole says that "bets on his success were turned into stock; and in the phrase of the times *he was done*, like other wagers on the funds." One of George Selwyn's correspondents confirms this:—"The bets in Change Alley, whether he will succeed or no, make another regular stock, and find as much employment for the brokers as ever the India business did. To-day they give sixty to return one hundred if he was elected."* He obtained 1,247 votes, but was unsuccessful. On the day following the declaration of the poll, he issued an address to the freeholders of the County of Middlesex. In one of the Middlesex electors he had a fervent admirer; this was the Rev. John Horne, Vicar of Brentford, better known as Horne Tooke, and a man of so much importance in the locality as to give Mason a reason for writing the line, "Brentford, the bishopric of Parson Horne." This clerical patriot had composed a song to celebrate the release of Wilkes from the Tower. He made his personal acquaintance in France, and, after parting from him, wrote letters, to which Wilkes returned no reply, filled with fulsome compliments, expressing his regret to find that Sterne did not speak "with that warmth and enthusiasm that I expect from every one that knows you."† At a later period he vituperated the man he had revered. For the present, however, he threw his whole energies into the Middlesex election, canvassing for Wilkes, lauding his merits at private meetings, appearing on the hustings as his supporter. Earl Temple contributed his part by

* George Selwyn and his Contemporaries, vol. ii. p. 265.
† Stephens's Memoirs of Horne Tooke, vol. i. p. 77.

providing the popular candidate with the necessary form of freehold qualification then exacted from every Knight of the Shire. The Duke of Portland was another of his aristocratic supporters. The election took place at Brentford, on the 28th of March. At the close of the poll the numbers were —Mr. Wilkes, 1,292; Mr. Cooke, 827; Sir W. B. Proctor, 807.

This result threw the Ministry and the courtiers into consternation. The mob was in ecstasies at the victory of a persecuted man over a relentless Court. As the rabble had cheered and compelled others to cheer and to illuminate their houses five years previously for "Wilkes and No. 45," so now they shouted and compelled others to shout and illuminate for "Wilkes and Liberty." No person, however high his rank, was able to claim exemption from the ordeal of declaring for Wilkes, or risking his life. In one case, recorded by Walpole, the privileges of an ambassador were disregarded in a manner which might have proved serious had it not been absurdly ludicrous. "The Count de Seilern, the Austrian ambassador, the most stately and ceremonious of men, they took out of his coach, and chalked 45 on the sole of his shoe. He complained in form of the insult: it was as difficult for the Ministers to help laughing as to give him redress." * Some of the persons who, in every age, find an object upon which to exercise perverted ingenuity, or to pass the time which they cannot usefully employ, busied themelves with No. 45 in the most unpractical and unprofitable fashion. According to Walpole, writing two months later, "It is a barren

* Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iii. p. 190.

season for all but cabalists, who can compound, divide, multiply No. 45 forty-five thousand different ways. I saw in the papers to-day, that somehow or other this famous number and the number of the beast in the Revelations is the same—an observation from which different persons will draw different conclusions." *

These occurrences naturally heightened the desire of the Ministry to disarm Wilkes by pardoning him. But the King's obstinacy and aversion could not be overcome, even though Lord Mansfield counselled mercy. Indeed, the determination to punish Wilkes at all hazards was so predominant in the royal breast that the King made a warm complaint to the Lord Chief Justice "of the conduct of the present Ministers, particularly of the Duke of Grafton, that a man in his situation should propose a pardon." Neither the counsels of prudence nor the maxims of good policy could restrain the monarch when his personal feelings inclined him to a particular course. It mattered nothing to him what the mob might do in their violence, or the Middlesex electors in the exercise of their constitutional functions. His mind was made up as to the right step to be taken; in other words, he was prepared to pile blunder upon blunder, and to crown one illegal act with another more illegal and more abominable still. A month after the election, he wrote to Lord North: "Though relying entirely on your attachment to my person, as well as in your hatred of any lawless proceeding, yet I think it highly expedient to apprise you that the expulsion

* Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's edition, vol. v. p. 111.

of Mr. Wilkes appears to be very essential, and must be effected." *

Meantime, Wilkes, though a declared violator of the laws of the land as well as one of the members for the county of Middlesex, had yet been fortunate enough to get his outlawry reversed on a purely technical point.

In declaring for the reversal of the outlawry, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield uttered one of the finest specimens of judicial oratory ever heard from the bench. He then used the phrase which has often been repeated since, and for which an earlier author has been sought in vain :—"*fiat Justitia ruat Cœlum.*" With a felicity of diction in keeping with his dignity of demeanour, he referred to the threats which had been used to intimidate those who might think fit to maintain the outlawry, and made the declaration which has been justly admired :—"I do not affect to scorn the opinion of mankind; I wish earnestly for popularity; I will seek and have popularity; but I will tell you how I will obtain it,—I will have that popularity which follows, and not that which is run after."

Wilkes now appeared to receive the sentence of the Court of King's Bench for the two offences of which a jury had found him guilty. Before sentence was pronounced he made a statement in Court to the effect that, though he had written No. 45, yet he was not the author of the *North Briton* as a whole. As for the other charge, the publication of a poem that had given just offence, he asserted that such an idea never entered his mind :—"Twelve copies of a small part of it had been printed at my house, at my own

* Correspondence of George III. with Lord North, vol. i. p. 2.

private press. I carefully locked them up, and I never gave one to my most intimate friend. Government, after the affair of the *North Briton*, bribed one of my servants to rob me of the copy, which was produced in the House of Peers, and afterwards before this honourable Court. The nation was justly offended, but not with me, for it was evident that I had not been guilty of the least offence to the public. I pray God to forgive, as I do, the jury, who have found me guilty of publishing a poem I concealed with care, and which is not even yet published, if a precise meaning can be affixed to any word in our language." * He was sentenced to be imprisoned for twenty-two months, to pay a fine of 1000*l.*, and to find security for good behaviour for seven years after the term of imprisonment had expired. For the first time in like cases, to stand in the pillory was not included in the punishment. It was doubtless feared that to put him in the pillory would lead to rioting, and might redound to the glorification of the victim.

When he first surrendered, and was sent to the King's Bench prison in custody of the marshal, the populace had shown their spirit by making a violent attempt at rescue; stopped the coach, forced the marshal out of it, and drew Wilkes away in triumph. As soon as he found a pretext for parting from his too boisterous and violent admirers, he did so, and escaped into the prison. The general belief was that at the meeting of Parliament, Wilkes would be released, and allowed to take his seat. In anticipation of popular tumults on the occasion, the King had given orders to have the military in readiness,

* Wilkes's Speeches, octavo edition, p. 155.

and Lord Weymouth, Secretary of State, wrote to Mr. Daniel Ponton, Chairman of the Quarter Sessions at Lambeth, requesting him not to scruple about employing the soldiers to quell a riot.

What had been foreseen and prepared for duly occurred. A dense crowd assembled before the prison in St. George's Fields, on the morning of the 10th of May. A Highland regiment was in readiness a short way off. Finding that Wilkes was not to be released, the mob grew riotous; the magistrate ordered the soldiers to fire; they obeyed, and several persons were wounded. Pursuing a young man who had made himself conspicuous, three soldiers entered an outhouse where they thought he had taken refuge, and one of them bayoneted another man dressed in a similar way, but who was wholly innocent of participation in the riot. An inquest was held on this man, whose name was Allen, and the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against Mr. Ponton, the magistrate who had ordered the firing, and against the soldier who had used his bayonet with fatal effect. Mr. Ponton was tried and acquitted; the soldier was dismissed the service and rewarded with a pension. On the day following the riot, Lord Barrington, Secretary at War, issued a general order conveying the special thanks of the King to the soldiers for the manner in which they had behaved, and stating "that every possible regard should be shown to them; their zeal and good behaviour on this occasion deserve it; and in case any disagreeable circumstance should happen in the execution of their duty, they shall have every defence and protection that the law can authorize and this office can give."

Although the King had counselled the expulsion of Wilkes immediately after the meeting of Parliament in May, yet nothing was done for ten months to give effect to the royal wish. Indeed, the Ministry were reluctant to move. The Duke of Grafton desired at first that no obstacle should be interposed to the member for Middlesex taking his seat. Having learned that Wilkes purposed petitioning the House and recounting his grievances, the Duke sent Mr. Fitzherbert to see Mr. Almon, and carry the assurance that, if the petition were withheld, "no attempt should be made in Parliament against him." Mr. Fitzherbert afterwards went and delivered the same message to Wilkes in person. The reply was that, thinking it his duty to send the petition, he could not alter his plan. On this Mr. Almon remarks, "it was a principal feature in Mr. Wilkes's character that, when he had taken a resolution, he never changed it." The petition was presented, and declared to be frivolous.

Seven months after the fatal riot in St. George's Fields, Wilkes procured a copy of Lord Weymouth's official letter to Mr. Ponton, and forwarded it, with an introductory sentence, for insertion in the *St. James's Chronicle*. The short preface ran thus:—"I send you the following authentic State paper, the date of which, prior by more than three weeks to the fatal 10th of May, shows how long the horrid massacre in St. George's Fields had been planned and determined upon, before it was carried into execution, and how long a hellish project can be brooded over by some infernal spirits without one moment's remorse." Lord Barrington complained in the House

of Commons of this publication, and procured an order for the summoning and examination of Wilkes. At the bar of the House he avowed himself the writer of the sentence, justifying himself by adding, "Whenever a Secretary of State shall dare to write so bloody a scroll, I will through life dare to write such prefatory remarks, as well as to make my appeal to the nation on the occasion." Before he had appeared and spoken these words, the House had resolved that the introductory sentence was "an insolent, scandalous, and seditious libel, tending to inflame and stir up the minds of his Majesty's subjects to sedition, and to a total subversion of all good order and legal government." After he had avowed the authorship and gloried in the act, Lord Barrington moved that he be expelled for having written three libels—the forty-fifth number of the *North Briton*, the *Essay on Woman*, and the introduction to Lord Weymouth's letter. It was urged in opposition, that he had already been punished for the two first offences, and that the last, being an offence against a peer, was not within the province of the House to notice, far less to resent. Even George Grenville could not be a party to this gross injustice, shameful persecution, and political blunder. He pointed out that the charge was cumulative, no single one of the alleged offences deserving to be treated in the way proposed. The expediency of expelling a man because he had written the *North Briton* might be admitted, while the propriety of expelling a man twice because he had been expelled once, could not rationally be maintained. However, after a long debate, the second expulsion of Wilkes was carried by 219 to 137.

This decision was arrived at on the 3rd of February, 1769. On the 16th of the same month, he was returned again without opposition. Next day there was a great debate in the House. The Ministry held that the expulsion of Wilkes incapacitated him for re-election. They were powerfully supported by a young member, Charles James Fox, who, in the case of Wilkes, had imbibed the opinions of his father and of his family, and made himself the mouth-piece of their prejudices. Dr. Blackstone, an older member, and a man of distinguished reputation, took the same side. George Grenville made a reply to him which was certainly crushing, and ought to have been conclusive. He cited the nine causes of disqualification which Blackstone had enumerated in his *Commentaries*, among which expulsion was not named. The list ended with these words, "but subject to the standing restrictions and disqualifications every subject is eligible of common right." Nothing could be clearer than that, in the deliberate opinion of Dr. Blackstone, there was no precedent for declaring Wilkes ineligible, in the circumstances, to sit in Parliament. This is rendered certain by the disingenuous action of that eminent writer and inconsiderate politician. In the edition of his work published after Wilkes had been declared ineligible, the sentence quoted above did not end at "common right," but continued as follows: "though there are instances where persons, in particular circumstances, have forfeited that common right, and been declared ineligible for that Parliament by a vote of the House of Commons, or for ever by an Act of the Legislature." *

* Note by Sir Denis le Marchant to Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iii. p. 363.

When such was the course pursued by the men of ability, stupider men were naturally ready to vote as they were directed; accordingly, the House resolved: "That John Wilkes, Esquire, having been in this session of Parliament expelled this House, was, and is, incapable of being elected a member to serve in the present Parliament." The Middlesex freeholders thought otherwise; they re-elected him a month afterwards. His opponent was Mr. Dingley, who could not get a proposer and seconder. That election was declared void on the following day.

The Government now resolved to set up an official candidate in opposition to the declared favourite of the constituency. To find a suitable man was no easy task. As Walpole remarks, "A man of the firmest virtue, or a ruffian of dauntless prostitution," was required. The choice fell on Colonel Luttrell, who was already in Parliament, but who undertook, out of gratitude for future favours, to serve the Government on this occasion. He had the additional inducement of personally detesting Wilkes. Two volunteers appeared in the persons of Mr. Serjeant Whittaker and Captain Roache. Colonel Luttrell had the enthusiastic support of Lord Holland and his sons. Lord Holland had not forgiven Wilkes for having attacked the Bute Administration in which he was an active and unscrupulous agent in furthering the views of the Court; he still cherished the hope of being promoted to an earldom, and he doubtless thought that active enmity towards the man whom the King hated was the most certain way in which to win royal approval and reward. His eldest son, Stephen Fox, proposed Colonel Luttrell. The result was that, on the

13th of April, Wilkes was returned for the fourth time. He obtained 1,143 votes ; Luttrell, 296 ; Whittaker, 5; and Roache none.

On the very evening of the election, the House of Commons resolved, "That Mr. Luttrell ought to have been returned." A petition was presented from the freeholders of Middlesex, praying to be heard at the bar. Their chosen advocates were permitted to appear, and they advanced indisputable arguments to prove that Wilkes had been duly elected. Having heard these unanswerable arguments, the House resolved on the 8th May, "That Henry Lawes Luttrell, Esquire, is duly elected a Knight of the Shire to serve in the present Parliament for the county of Middlesex." The monstrosity of these proceedings is obvious from a bare recital ; if comment be needed, it cannot be more appropriately given than in the words of Burke :— "Thus ended the fifth act of this tragi-comedy : a tragi-comedy acted by his Majesty's servants, at the desire of several persons of quality, for the benefit of Mr. Wilkes, and at the expense of the Constitution."

Now began a struggle compared with which the contest for the condemnation of General Warrants was but an insignificant skirmish. The case was not merely that of an individual to whom a great wrong had been done ; the constitutional right of electors to choose their representatives was in jeopardy. What had happened to Middlesex might be the lot of any county in the land. The House of Commons might be composed of men representing a contemptible minority of the electors ; if the principle upheld by the Ministry prevailed, the House might even be self-elected. Thus

it was that the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty" became, not the hasty and aimless utterance of the rabble, but the watch-word of a great party composed of the noblest spirits in the land.

By Lord Chatham, in the House of Lords, the proceedings in the case of the Middlesex election were denounced with extraordinary vehemence. At the opening of the session on the 9th of January 1770, he moved an amendment to the address, to the effect that in order to appease popular discontent the case of the expulsion of John Wilkes should be taken into consideration. This was vigorously supported by Lord Camden, who now atoned for a rather too lax vigilance over the public interests by making a confession of the experience he had gone through, and of the snubs he had suffered and borne in silence. Lord Mansfield opposed the motion, making personal reflections upon Wilkes, and to him Lord Chatham made the following incomparable reply:—"The character and circumstances of Mr. Wilkes have been very improperly introduced into this question, not only here, but in that court of judicature where his cause was tried, I mean the House of Commons. With one party he was a patriot of the first magnitude; with the other the vilest incendiary. For my own part I consider him merely and indifferently as an English subject, possessed of certain rights which the laws have given him, and which the laws alone can take from him. I am neither moved by his private vices nor by his public merits. In his person, though he were the worst of men, I contend for the safety and security of the best; and God forbid, my lords, that there should be a power in this country of measuring the civil rights of the

subject by his moral character, or by any other rule but the fixed laws of the land." Despite the force and justice of his appeal, Chatham failed to attain his object, only 36 peers voting for his amendment, and 203 against it.*

A few months afterwards, he reiterated his sentiments in these words: "Here, in my place in this illustrious assembly, I do avow that Colonel Luttrell is no representative of the people. He is a mere nominee, thrust in by enemies of the laws of the land, and to the principles—the established principles—of the Constitution." Again, in December of the same year, he said, "We cannot, therefore, enter into any debate in which the Middlesex business will not be proper; in which it will not be absolutely necessary. I shall, for my part, consider it as the alarm-bell to liberty; I shall ring it incessantly in the ears of the whole kingdom, till I rouse the people to a proper sense of their injuries, and convince Ministers, entrenched as they are in their venal majorities, that the privileges of Englishmen are never to be infringed with impunity." †

While Chatham was employing his marvellous gift of eloquence to condemn those who had outraged freedom of election in the person of Wilkes, voices were raised with as great emphasis, though with inferior power, on the same side in the House of Commons. Chief among those who stood forward to censure what had been done, and to labour for a reversal of indefensible resolutions, stood Sir George Savile, representing the great county of Yorkshire. He

* Parliamentary History, vol. xvi. pp. 663, 666.
† *Ibid.*, vol. xvi. p. 1306.

was no friend of Wilkes. He had large possessions. He was not ambitious of rank or place. Either or both he might have obtained had he desired it. Such a man as this had an influence in the House of Commons which an official character would have weakened rather than increased. It was, then, with no common effect that he uttered the following declaration: "I look on this House as sitting illegally after their illegal act. They have betrayed their trust. I will not add epithets, because epithets only weaken; therefore I will not say that they have betrayed their country corruptly, flagitiously, and scandalously, but I do say that they have betrayed their country; and I stand here to receive the punishment for having said so." * Attempts were made by Lord North and General Conway to explain away this declaration, and to attribute it to a momentary ebullition of temper. But Sir George Savile would accept no such defence; on the contrary, he expressed himself ready to reiterate his words, and resolved to stand by them to the letter. The House actually submitted to the affront without further protest.

Out of doors the excitement was far more intense than within the walls of St. Stephen's. Making common cause with the aggrieved freeholders of Middlesex, the freeholders of the most important counties in England met together, and signed petitions requesting the Sovereign to dissolve a Parliament which had openly betrayed its trust. So novel and general was the movement that it formed an epoch in our constitutional practice; the custom of holding public meetings

* This is the version preserved by Walpole; that in the Parliamentary History differs in the wording, vol. xvi. p. 699.

for the discussion of public grievances dates from this period. At Court, the action and demands of the people were viewed with undissembled amazement and anger. The King's friends unanimously expressed their abhorrence of this apparent attempt to encroach on the royal prerogative; an attempt they considered all the more blameworthy because the conduct of the House of Commons had given the King perfect satisfaction.

Conspicuous among the remonstrances was one which proceeded from the City of London. The Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Livery met in Common Hall and voted a remonstrance, in which it was said "that the majority of the House of Commons had done a deed more ruinous in its consequences than the levying of ship-money by Charles the First, and the dispensing power of James the Second." This document was delivered to the King, seated in state, by Lord-Mayor Beckford, accompanied by the sheriffs and two hundred of the civic body. In reply, the King pronounced its contents to be "disrespectful to him, injurious to Parliament, and irreconcilable to the principles of the constitution." Having said this, he "turned round to his courtiers and burst out laughing."

Not long afterwards, the Lord-Mayor reappeared with another address, in which the prayer of the first was repeated, and the royal reply deplored. The King answered: "I should have been wanting to the public, as well as to myself, if I had not expressed my dissatisfaction at the late address. My sentiments on that subject continue the same, and I shall ill-deserve to be considered as the father of my people, if I should

suffer myself to be prevailed upon to make such a use of my prerogative, as I cannot but think inconsistent with the interest, and dangerous to the constitution, of the country." This incensed, instead of soothing, the deputation. The Lord Mayor, disregarding etiquette, uttered a protest which made the King redden with wrath. What he really said is a matter of dispute; but among the words which he accepted as his own were these: "Let us not be dismissed without some comfort, without some hope of redress. Permit me, sir, to observe that whoever has already dared, or shall hereafter endeavour, by false insinuations and suggestions, to alienate your Majesty's affections from your loyal subjects in general, and from the City of London in particular, is an enemy to your Majesty's person and family, a violator of the public peace, and a betrayer of our happy constitution, as it was established at the glorious Revolution." * These remarks, which, though uncourtly, are not unwholesome, were inscribed, in letters of gold, by the grateful citizens of London, on a monument erected in memory of the patriotic Lord Mayor who uttered them.

The effect of these addresses and remonstrances on the King was to irritate him beyond measure. He contemplated the most desperate measures rather than succumb. Laying his hand on his sword, he said to General Conway; "I will have recourse to this sooner than yield to dissolution." Language equally censurable was used in Parliament. Colonel Barré there exclaimed that "disregard to petitions might lead the people to think of *assassination*." †

* Stephens's Life of Horne Tooke, vol. i. p. 157.
† Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iv. pp. 37, 60.

While the country and the Court were in a ferment on account of Wilkes, he was bearing his imprisonment with a philosophy due in large measure to the marks of kindness of which he was the recipient. He was visited by Lord Rockingham, Burke, and men of lesser note. Dr. Somerville, who was in London at that time, paid a visit to the prison, and found that Wilkes was "lodged in a commodious house detached from the rooms occupied by the rest of the prisoners, and his table was daily supplied with the most rare and costly delicacies, presented to him by his admirers." * Hardly a day passed on which he did not receive from some part of the island presents of fish, game, or fruit. More substantial tokens of sympathy were gifts of money. Mr. Temple bequeathed £300 to him; the Duchess of Queensberry and Lady Elizabeth Germain each sent him £100. The like amount was forwarded by some admirers in Newcastle, and from Charleston, South Carolina, came the handsome gift of £1,500. He obtained, what he valued quite as much as money, a striking testimony of confidence from several of the citizens of London; they elected him Alderman for the Ward of Farringdon Without. He was credited in many quarters with being the author of the letters signed "Junius," and this mistaken notion, if it raised him in the esteem of a large section of the community, rendered him still more obnoxious to every courtier.

On the 17th of April, 1770, his term of imprisonment expired. He did not remain in London to be made the subject of a demonstration, but started immediately for Bath. The Lord Mayor had issued a pro-

* My Own Life and Times, p. 152.

clamation enjoining the citizens to remain tranquil. Many houses were illuminated in the evening, among them the Lord Mayor's, on the front of which flamed the word "Liberty, in white letters three feet high." * His release was also celebrated with popular rejoicings "at Lynn, Swaffham, Bristol, and a few other towns." † His city adherents did not desert him after his release; on the contrary, they became more emphatic than ever in manifesting their fidelity and affection. What he had undergone for the public cause excited their admiration and loosened their purse-strings. A society, taking the name of "Supporters of the Bill of Rights," was formed in order to relieve him from his pecuniary embarrassments. His spendthrift and generous habits, combined with the faithlessness of Mr. Humphrey Cotes, had landed him deeply in debt. By becoming security for others, he had made himself liable to pay £11,000. This society discharged his every obligation, expending in so doing nearly £20,000.

In 1771, much to the annoyance of the Court, he was elected one of the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex. During his shrievalty he admitted the public into the galleries of the Old Bailey, and he gained the approbation of many prejudiced persons, who thought him too fond of the French, by ordering that no French wine should be given at his entertainments. Mr. Almon considers this "the best refutation of that illiberal suspicion; for he was, in plain truth, a true Englishman." Mr. Almon omits to explain why, if port and sherry were drunk at his

* Walpole's Letters, vol. v. p. 233.
† Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iv. p. 118.

banquets, he was not accused of undue partiality for the Portuguese and Spaniards.

His election as Sheriff grieved the King exceedingly. Every effort had been made to procure the return of the Ministerial candidates. Writing to Lord North, he expressed his hope that the success of the partisans of the Court might be as brilliant as possible, "the more so as it will unveil what has certainly been all along the fact, that Wilkes has been, in his various struggles, supported by a small though desperate part of the Livery, whilst the sober and major part of that body have from fear kept aloof." * What added a bitterness to the failure of the royal hopes was the circumstance that the very large majority which voted for the man who was detested at Court, thereby testified their recognition of a victory gained by Mr. Alderman Wilkes, on behalf of the printers of newspapers, alike over the King and the House of Commons.

It had become customary at this period for the daily newspapers to publish reports of the debates in Parliament. This was done in direct contravention of a resolution of the House of Commons that it was a breach of privilege for a news-writer to pen, and for a printer to publish, "any account of the debates, or other proceedings of this House, or any Committee thereof, as well during the recess, as the sitting of Parliament; and that this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offenders." Displeased with the publicity given to their proceedings, in defiance of the foregoing resolution, some members resolved upon ending the scandal by punishing the

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i. p. 76.

printers of the offending newspapers. A formal complaint was made by Colonel Onslow, and an order issued for the attendance of two printers, R. Thompson and J. Wheble. To shield the printers, Wilkes concerted a plan whereby the Lord Mayor and the senior Alderman should resist the enforcement of the order within the City. The two printers paid no heed to the order of the House, and concealed themselves when the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms came to arrest them for contempt. Thereupon the House presented an address requesting the King to issue a royal proclamation for the apprehension of the printers. The proclamation was issued, and a reward of £50 was offered for the capture of either. There was no reluctance on the King's part to support the House of Commons in maintaining their privileges. He was always ready to countenance high-handed measures which yielded him a convenient precedent or aided his projects.

For newspapers he had the aversion which despotically minded rulers have for the strongest checks upon their power. In a letter to Lord North he called them "daily productions of untruths;" he considered it his royal duty to restrict their circulation. Yet, as he wrote in another letter, he was averse to anything being done which should convert the affair into a serious conflict, or thwart the design of its promoters, adding: "it is highly necessary that this strange and lawless method of publishing debates in the papers should be put a stop to; but is not the House of Lords, as a Court of Record, the best Court to bring such miscreants before? as it can fine as well as imprison, and as the Lords have broader shoulders to support any odium that this salutary measure may occasion in

the minds of the vulgar."* The Ministers thought it better to advise the issuing of a proclamation, in accordance with the request of the House of Commons, and the King signed a document which Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, notwithstanding his anxiety to sanction whatever was done by his royal master, regarded with horror as a constitutional lawyer.

Acting in obedience to the royal proclamation, a journeyman printer, named E. T. Carpenter, apprehended J. Wheble, and brought him before the sitting magistrate at Guildhall. Wilkes, who was then on duty, discharged Wheble, and committed Carpenter for assaulting and unlawfully capturing him, taking sureties, however, for his appearance. Meantime, the Speaker issued his warrant for the apprehension of J. Miller, publisher of the *Evening Post*, who had continued to disregard the resolutions of the House. Whitham, the deputy serjeant-at-arms, arrested Miller, and for so doing, he was committed to Wood Street Compter by the Lord Mayor, Mr. Alderman Wilkes, and Mr. Alderman Oliver; but was immediately discharged on giving security for his appearance at the General Quarter Sessions. For this act, the clerk to the Lord Mayor was summoned to attend before the House with the Minute Book; the minute relating to the foregoing proceedings having been read, the clerk was compelled to expunge it. The House next ordered the Lord Mayor and Mr. Alderman Oliver to be committed to the Tower, and Mr. Alderman Wilkes to appear at the bar. Commenting upon these proceedings, the King wrote: "I owne I could have wished that Wilkes had not been ordered

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i., p. 57.

before the House, for he must be in a jail the next term if not given new life by some punishment inflicted on him, which will bring him new supplies; and I do not doubt that he will hold such a language that will oblige some notice to be taken of him."* What Wilkes did was to write to the Speaker, intimating that, not being addressed as a member of Parliament, and ordered to attend in his place according to usage, he would disobey the summons. Thereupon a second order was made for his attendance, which he also disregarded. A third order was made for his attendance on the 8th of April, after which the House adjourned till the 9th, and the matter dropped. The King had written; "as for Wilkes he is below the notice of the House;" but the action of the House unmistakeably showed something more than reluctance to provoke him by fresh severities.

The Lord Mayor and Mr. Alderman Oliver, though they suffered more personal inconvenience than the colleague who inspired their movements, gained in popularity what they lost in discomfort. During their brief confinement in the Tower, they received noted marks of esteem from the leaders of the Opposition; Lord Rockingham, Burke, and others paid them a complimentary visit. They were honoured by their fellow-citizens as staunch upholders of the rights of the City, and as martyrs for the good old cause. Yet to Wilkes was ascribed the triumph of the printers. The victory itself was so complete, that no hindrance was afterwards offered to the reporting of Parliamentary debates. Even the King, who had been accustomed to trust for a report of what

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i., p. 66.

passed in either House to the written summaries of his First Minister, turned to the newspapers for information, as is proved by the following extract from a letter to Pitt: "The account of what passed in the House of Commons yesterday, which I suppose by reading the various newspapers, may be pretty nearly collected," &c.* This service largely contributed to Wilkes being elected Sheriff. In commemoration of it he was presented by the Court of Common Council with a silver goblet, which cost one hundred guineas. Being asked to select a design for the ornamentation of the goblet, he chose the subject of the death of Cæsar, with these lines of Churchill as an inscription:

> "May every tyrant feel
> The keen deep searchings of a patriot steel."

Having served as Sheriff, he was put in nomination for the Mayoralty. To defeat him, all the weight and influence of the Court were brought to bear. Moreover, there was a party in the City led by Parson Horne, which united with the courtiers in opposing him. Disputes as to money matters had converted the former passionate admirer of Wilkes into a rabid and pertinacious foe. The King, whose desire to witness the downfall of Wilkes was unabated, watched the election with keen interest. With his accustomed unscrupulousness in attributing evil purposes to those by whom he was thwarted, his Majesty wrote as follows to Lord North: "The unpromising appearance of this day's poll does not in the least surprise me, knowing that Wilkes is not bound by any tyes, therefore would poll non-freemen rather than lose the election; if he is not one of the two returned, he is lost for ever; but if he

* Earl Stanhope's Life of William Pitt, vol. i., p. 5, Appendix.

obtains that, though he may still lose that by a scrutiny, it will enable him to stand again the next year." * Wilkes having been returned at the head of the poll, a scrutiny was demanded, whereupon the King wrote : " I hope the scrutiny will be conducted with great exactness, which, if it be obtained under the direction of such sheriffs, I doubt not but Wilkes will not only not be returned, but that his little regard to true votes will come to light, which must do him great injury even among his admirers." A scrutiny confirmed the place of Wilkes at the head of the poll. The choice of the Court of Aldermen fell, however, upon Mr. Alderman Bull, the next in order of seniority.

In the following year the contest was renewed, Wilkes being again returned, but he was not chosen by the Court of Aldermen. Ex-Lord Mayor Townshend made himself conspicuous on the side of the Court and against Wilkes. Party feeling ran high, and strong things were said on both sides. It was rumoured, indeed, that in consequence of what one of these two men had said, a duel had been fought, in which Townshend shot his adversary dead. The statement was wholly unfounded, yet, circulating on a Sunday, it gained credence for a few hours. The news having been communicated to the clerk of a Methodist meeting-house near the Park, he is reported to have announced it to the congregation in the following pious couplet, added to the hymn he gave out—

" The wicked Wilkes by Townshend has been shot,
So may the ungodly always go to pot."

At the election of 1774, Wilkes was chosen Lord

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i., p. 110.

Mayor of London. The circumstances connected with this event, and the impression it made upon contemporaries, cannot be detailed more clearly and correctly than in the words of Horace Walpole: "The Court on one side, and Alderman Townshend on the other, meant to gain or give the preference to any man over Wilkes. They set up two insignificant Aldermen, Eisdale and Kennet, as competitors, not having been able to prevail on Sawbridge to stand for it again. . . . Wilkes and Bull had the majority of hands, and after a poll, which was demanded for Eisdale and Kennet, Wilkes and Bull were returned to the Court of Aldermen, who at last did declare Wilkes Lord Mayor. Thus, after so much persecution by the Court, after so many attempts on his life, after a long imprisonment in a gaol, after all his own crimes and indiscretions, did this extraordinary man, of more extraordinary fortune, attain the highest office in so grave and important a city as the capital of England, always reviving the more opposed and oppressed, and unable to shock Fortune, and make her laugh at *him*, who laughed at everybody and everything. The duration of his influence was the most wonderful part of his history. Massaniello, a fisher-boy, attained the supreme power of Naples, but perished in three days. Rienzi governed Rome, but lost it by his folly. Sacheverel balanced the glory of Marlborough in the height of his victories, but never was heard of more. Wilkes was seen through, detected, yet gained ground: and all the power of the Crown, all the malice of the Scots, all the abilities of Lord Mansfield, all the violence of Alderman Townshend, all the want of policy and parts in the Opposition, all the treachery of his own

friends, could not demolish him. He equally baffled the King and Parson Horne, though both neglected no latitude to compass his ruin. It is in this tenth year of his war on the Court that he gained so signal a victory." *

That Walpole should have spoken of the success of Wilkes as a signal victory may excite a smile in the faces of those who estimate at its present value the post of Lord Mayor of London. A century ago, however, the Chief Magistrate of the City was not necessarily a man who had passed through certain minor offices, and who rose by routine to fill the highest. At that time the Corporation was a political power, which Ministers had to take into account, and Sovereigns had to propitiate. Wealthy merchants and bankers concerned themselves in municipal elections, and gladly filled municipal offices. Their doings were watched with great interest by many foreigners of note, among whom were Voltaire and Montesquieu. These writers informed their countrymen, with perfect truth, that the Lord Mayor of London was nearly as important a personage as the Prime Minister of Great Britain. The French have been told what the Mayoralty was in the fulness of its grandeur and power; but no one has made them understand the nature and reality of the decadence. Hence, the French still speak and write of the Lord Mayor of London as a man of the first rank in English public life. A respectable tradesman is often ambitious of becoming Lord Mayor, in view of the possibility that during his year of office some happy accident may lead to his being Knighted or made a Baronet. When

* Last Journals of Walpole, vol. i., p. 420.

Wilkes became Lord Mayor, every one felt that he had attained a dignity which was a real distinction, and that the King had sustained a check of the most pointed and trying character.

At the general election in 1784, he was returned unopposed as member for Middlesex, for the fifth time. Since his expulsion, he had done nothing to make himself a greater favourite of the Ministry or the King; his offences, on the contrary, had increased in number and magnitude. Yet it was deemed futile and perilous to prolong the crusade against him; accordingly, no objection was made when he entered the House and took his seat.

Ten years previously he had sat there as member for the borough of Aylesbury. He had been expelled; his ruin had been predicted by the King; his death had been compassed by Mr. Martin; he had been imprisoned for libel; he had defied the House when acting as a magistrate; he had been expelled a second time, and now, accompanied by ten or twelve members who were elected solely because he had vouched for them, and they had pledged their support to him, he re-entered it as Lord Mayor of London and Knight of the Shire for Middlesex.

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II.

HIS SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT.

When Wilkes was first elected for Middlesex, Walpole wrote: "In my opinion the House of Commons is the place where he can do the least hurt, for he is a wretched speaker, and will sink to contempt." That he was not an effective orator is possible, but that he delivered many able, timely, and excellent speeches is a fact.

His first appearance was in keeping with his reputation. When it was proposed to commemorate in the usual manner the day on which Charles the First died, Wilkes protested against the anniversary being kept as a day of fasting and prayer, adding that had it not been for the execution of that monarch "we should at this hour have had no constitution, degenerated into the most abject slaves on the face of the earth, not governed by the known and equal laws of a limited monarchy, but subject to the imperious will of an arbitrary sovereign." In our day, the custom of bemoaning the so-called martyrdom of King Charles, has happily become extinct. Thanks to the efforts of Earl Stanhope, the prayer-book has been purged of a service composed in memory of an event which sensible men of all parties are agreed in admitting to have been at the worst nothing more than a serious error of judgment.

Wilkes was a consistent and energetic opponent of the American war, a war unjustifiable in its inception, deplorable in its purpose, which originated in a mistake, was prosecuted with levity, and ended in humiliation. Speaking in 1775, he warned the Government against driving the colonists to extremities, and thereby rendering reconciliation impossible. Nothing said by Burke or Fox was sounder in reasoning and policy than are the following sentences in that speech: "Whether their present state is that of rebellion, or of a fit and just resistance to unlawful acts of power, to our attempts to rob them of their property and liberties, as they imagine, I shall not declare This I know, a successful resistance is a revolution, not a rebellion. Rebellion, indeed, appears on the back of a flying enemy, but revolution flames on the breastplate of the victorious warrior. Who can tell, Sir, whether in consequence of this day's violent and mad address to his Majesty, the scabbard may not be thrown away by them as well as by us; and, should success attend them, whether in a few years the independent Americans may not celebrate the glorious era of the Revolution of 1775, as we do that of 1668? The generous efforts of our forefathers for freedom Heaven crowned with success, or their noble blood had dyed our scaffolds, like that of Scottish traitors and rebels; and the period of our history which does us the most honour would have been deemed a rebellion against the lawful authority of the Prince, not a resistance authorized by all the laws of God and man, not the expulsion of a tyrant. The policy, Sir, of this measure I can no more comprehend than I can acknowledge the justice of it. Is your force adequate to the

attempt? I am satisfied it is not. What are your armies? and how are they to be kept up and recruited? Do you recollect that the single province of Massachusetts Bay has at this moment 30,000 men well trained and disciplined? Do you not know that they can bring near 90,000 men into the field? They will do it when everything dear to them is at stake, when they have their liberties to defend against cruel oppressors and invaders. You will not be able to conquer and keep even that single province." *

On another occasion, in the same year, when an address of thanks was moved to the "Father of his people" for the measures adopted to prosecute the war, Wilkes again spoke in the most emphatic terms of condemnation of what had been done, and again predicted failure. "I speak, Sir, as a firm friend to England and America, but still more to universal liberty and the rights of all mankind. I trust no part of the subjects of this vast empire will ever submit to be slaves. I am sure the Americans are too high-spirited to brook the idea. . . . England was never engaged in a contest of such importance to our most valuable concerns and possessions. We are fighting for the subjection—the unconditional submission of a country infinitely more extended than our own, of which every day increases the wealth, the natural strength, the population. Should we not succeed, it will be a loss never enough to be deplored, a bosom friendship soured to hate and resentment. We shall be considered as their most implacable enemies, an eternal separation will follow, and the grandeur of the British empire pass away. Success—final success

* Wilkes's Speeches, octavo edition, pp. 16, 17.

seems to me not equivocal, not uncertain, but impossible. However we may differ among ourselves, they are perfectly united. On this side the Atlantic, party rage unhappily divides us, but one soul animates the vast northern continent of America, the General Congress, and each provincial Assembly. An appeal has been made to the sword; and at the close of the last campaign what have we conquered? Bunker Hill only, and with the loss of 1,200 men. Are we to pay as dearly for the rest of America? The idea of the conquest of that immense continent is as romantic as it is unjust."*

Not content with opposing addresses approving of the King's policy, Wilkes supported the motion of Mr. Alderman Oliver, in 1775, for an address asking for the names of those who, by their advice, had brought the Mother Country into antagonism with her colonies. In this speech he ventured to style Samuel Adams and John Hancock, not only "worthy gentlemen," but "true patriots." He insisted, as was his wont, upon the physical difficulty of coping with the colonies in civil strife, using this argument, which is more in his traditional vein than the arguments he employed when speaking in Parliament:—"The Americans, Sir, are a pious and religious people. With much ardour and success they follow the first command of Heaven—'*Be fruitful and multiply.*' While they are fervent in these devout exercises—while the men continue enterprising and healthy, the women kind and prolific, all your attempts to subdue them by force will be ridiculous and unavailing—will be regarded by them with scorn.

* Speeches, p. 44.

and abhorrence. They are daily strengthening; and if you lose the present moment of reconciliation, to which this motion tends, you lose all. America may now be claimed or regained, but cannot be subdued. Gentlemen, Sir, do not seem to have considered the astonishing disadvantages under which we engage in this contest against the combined powers of America, not only from the distance and natural strength of the country, but the peculiar and fortunate circumstances of a young rising empire. The Congress, Sir, have not the monstrous load of a debt of above one hundred and forty millions, like our Parliament, to struggle with, the interest of which would swallow up all their taxes! nor a numerous and hungry band of useless placemen and pensioners to provide for; nor has luxury yet enervated their minds or bodies. Every shilling which they raise will go to the man who fights the battles of his country. They set out like a young heir with a noble landed estate, unincumbered with enormous family debts; while we appear the poor, old, feeble, exhausted, and ruined parent—but exhausted and ruined by our own wickedness, prodigality, and profligacy." *

In the following year, when the Declaration of Independence had been issued, he counselled the withdrawal of our armed force from the United States, and the negociation of peace on "just, fair, and equal terms, without the idea of compulsion." Replying to Governor Johnstone, who had criticised the style of that famous declaration, and objected to it, on the ground that it had been drawn up to captivate the people, Wilkes said: "That, Sir, is the very reason why I approve it

* Speeches, pp. 51, 52.

most as a composition, as well as a wise political measure; for the *people* are to decide this great controversy. If they are *captivated* by it, the end is attained. The polished periods, the harmonious, happy expressions, the grace, ease, and elegance of a beautiful diction, which we chiefly admire, very little *captivate* the people of America. Manly, nervous sense they relish, even in the most awkward and uncouth dress of language. Whatever composition produces the effect which is intended, in the most forcible manner, is, in my opinion, the best, and the most to be approved." *

He wisely and pithily remarked at another time: "Let us treat with the liberal spirit of freemen and Englishmen. Unconditional submission is unconstitutional submission, and becomes only the slaves of an arbitrary monarch." When disasters accumulated, and the failure which Wilkes had foretold became a certainty after France had made common cause with the United States, he gave expression to other words which have been literally fulfilled: "We know that there is no more *love of liberty* in the French Court than in our own; but I rejoice that *liberty* will have a resting-place, a sure asylum, in America, from the persecution of almost all the princes of the earth."

As was natural, he exerted himself year after year to persuade the Commons to expunge from their Journals the condemnatory resolution relating to his election for Middlesex. Not till Lord Rockingham was Prime Minister for the second time did he succeed. On the 3rd of May, 1782, it was resolved and ordered that the entry in the journal of the 17th of February,

* Speeches, p. 89.

1769, "that John Wilkes, Esquire, having been in this Session of Parliament expelled this House, was and is incapable of being elected a member to serve in this present Parliament," should be expunged. Moreover, an order was also made: "That all the declarations, orders, and resolutions of this House, respecting the election of John Wilkes, Esquire, for the county of Middlesex, as a void election, the due legal election of Henry Lawes Luttrell, Esquire, into Parliament for the said county, and the incapacity of John Wilkes, Esquire, to be elected a member to serve in the said Parliament, be expunged from the journals of this House, as being subversive of the rights of the whole body of electors of this kingdom." * This was a genuine and important constitutional victory, and quite as worthy of being held in remembrance as the memorable protest against Ship Money or General Warrants.

None of his Parliamentary utterances did him greater credit as a man of culture than a speech in which he advocated the claims of the British Museum to national recognition and support. He considered the establishment of that Museum to be pre-eminent among the many proofs of the improvement of the national taste and the love of polite literature. He thought that the trustees should be efficiently aided alike in their efforts to fulfil their trust, and to extend the laudable purposes of their institution; consequently, that a large addition ought to be made to the funds placed at their disposal. He went on to tell the House what specially merits note, seeing that the words were spoken in 1777, and that the wishes then

* Speeches, p. 373.

expressed have borne most ample though tardy fruit:—"I wish their plan much enlarged, especially on two important objects—books and paintings. This capital, after so many ages, remains without any considerable public library. Rome has the immense collection of the Vatican, and Paris scarcely yields to the mistress of the world by the greatness of the King's Library. They are both open at stated times, with every proper accommodation, to all strangers. London has no large public library. The best here is the Royal Society's; but even that is inconsiderable, neither is it open to the public, nor are the necessary conveniences afforded strangers for reading and transcribing. The British Museum, Sir, is rich in manuscripts, the Harleian Collection, the Cottonian Library, the collection of Charles the First, and many others, especially of our own history; but it is wretchedly poor in printed books. I wish, Sir, a sum were allowed by Parliament for the purchase of the most valuable editions of the best authors, and an Act passed to oblige every printer, under a certain penalty, to send a copy bound of every publication he made to the British Museum. Our posterity, by this and other acquisitions, might perhaps possess a more valuable treasure than even the celebrated Alexandrian collection; for, notwithstanding that selfishness which marks the present age, we have not quite lost sight of every beneficial prospect for futurity . . . . . I understand that an application is intended to Parliament, that one of the finest collections [of paintings] in Europe, that at Houghton, made by Sir Robert Walpole, of acknowledged superiority to most in Italy, and scarcely inferior even to the Duke of

Orleans, in the Palais Royal at Paris, may be sold by the family. I hope it will not be dispersed, but purchased by Parliament, and added to the British Museum.* I wish, Sir, the eye of painting as fully gratified as the ear of music is in this island, which at last bids fair to become a favourite abode of the polite arts. A noble gallery ought to be built in the spacious garden of the British Museum for the reception of that invaluable treasure. Such an important acquisition as the Houghton Collection would, in some degree, alleviate the concern which every man of taste now feels at being deprived of viewing those prodigies of art, the cartoons of the divine Raphael." Financial objections did not weigh with him, as he considered the treasures of a State well employed in works of national magnificence. He concluded his appeal by a statement, which, he thought, justice required him to make, concerning the trustees of the Museum, a statement, too, which the lapse of time and longer experience has not in the smallest degree invalidated:—"Perhaps the trustees of the British Museum are the only body of men who have never been suspected of want either of fidelity or economy. I think, therefore, we may safely trust them further, not penuriously, but largely, on a great national concern, especially when their accounts are so frequently submitted to the examination of Parliament." † One effect of this speech was to make Burke rise and move that the grant to the trustees should be increased by 1000*l.* Wilkes seconded the motion; it was opposed by Sir

* Unhappily this hope was not gratified. Two years afterwards the collection was bought by the Empress of Russia for 40,555*l.*

† Speeches, p. 141.

Grey Cooper on behalf of the Government, and negatived without a division.

While at no period of his career the advocate of subversive changes in our parliamentary system, he was a consistent advocate of parliamentary reform. In 1776 he moved for leave to bring in a Bill "For a just and equal representation of the people of England in Parliament." This measure resembled in its outlines that which Chatham propounded, and that which William Pitt, some years afterwards, vainly urged the House of Commons to accept. It included the suppression of the rotten boroughs and the enfranchisement of the dwellers in Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds. Such a measure would have proved most serviceable if adopted; but it was too far in advance of the public opinion of the time to receive due consideration out of doors, or even to be discussed in the House.

The parliamentary speeches in which he figures as a true friend of liberty are those relating to the abolition of the tests which in those days pressed heavily, not on Roman Catholics only, but also upon all Protestant dissenting teachers and clergymen. He ably contended that the civil magistrate had no right to interfere in matters of conscience. Declaring himself a member of the Church of England, he denounced persecution in every form, refusing even to persecute the atheist, saying: "I think he has a right to toleration, and, for my own part, I pity him, for he wants the consolation which I enjoy."* He pleaded powerfully for the emancipation of particular dissenting teachers from trammels which were at once intolerable and disgraceful. He affirmed

* Speeches, p. 331.

"that there are not in Europe men of more liberal ideas, more general knowledge, more cultivated understandings, and in all respects better calculated to form the rising generation, to give the state wise and virtuous citizens, than the Doctors Price, Priestley, and Kippis. Yet the rod of persecution hangs over them by a single thread, if they do not subscribe thirty-five articles and a half of our Church. A mercenary informer or a blind zealot may bring under the lash of the law men who do honour to the age in which we live, and the most abandoned of our species have it now in their power to persecute virtue and genius, when exerted for the benefit of mankind."* This speech was considered so effective and timely by those on whose behalf it was delivered that at a meeting of the general body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers the following resolution was passed and acted upon:—"By order of the general body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, assembled at the Library, Red Cross Street, the second instant, Dr. Kippis, Dr. Stennet, Dr. Harris, and Mr. Toller wait on Mr. Wilkes with the unanimous thanks of that body for his kind attention to their Bill, and his generous and active zeal in support of the cause of religious liberty."

This gratifying token of acknowledgment was not the only one he received for his speeches and votes in the House of Commons. When, in 1780, a vote of thanks was proposed to Sir Charles Clinton and Lord Cornwallis for their services in America, he opposed the motion, saying that "Every part of it conveys an approbation of the American war—a war unfounded in principle and fatal in its consequences

* Speeches, p. 333.

to this country. I condemned it at the beginning, and have regularly opposed its progress in every stage, both in and out of Parliament. The eminent and very important services to his Majesty and this country, mentioned in the motion, I entirely disapprove, and consequently shall withhold the poor pittance of my thanks and gratitude where I do not think them merited, in a war of glaring injustice and wretched policy."* In consequence of the effectiveness of the speech, which opened with the foregoing sentences, it was resolved at a meeting of the Westminster Committee of Association, Charles James Fox in the Chair, "That the thanks of this Committee be given to Mr. Wilkes, and such other friends to public liberty as joined in opposing the vote of thanks to General Clinton and Lord Cornwallis, upon Monday last, on the ground that success in the American war would be the ruin of the liberties both of America and England."

When the Gordon riots of 1780 had jeopardized the safety of the entire City, and when the Lord Mayor displayed a degree of pusillanimity almost criminal, Wilkes stood forth in defence of law and order, and was alike energetic and successful in repelling the onslaught of the rioters upon the Bank of England. For his services at this crisis, he received the special thanks of the Privy Council. He was as zealous in shielding the persons and property of Roman Catholics as in defending the Bank from pillage. When the riots were suppressed, he found, on returning home, a card from the following eminent members of the Church of Rome:—"Lord Petre, Sir Edward Swinburne, Mr. Stapleton, Mr. William Sheldon, and

* Speeches, p. 357.

Mr. Homyhold have been to wait upon Mr. Wilkes, to thank him for his support and protection." *

After the fall of Lord North's administration, Wilkes, who had hitherto acted as an independent member, gave a general support to the second Administration of Lord Rockingham. To the Coalition of North and Fox he was strongly opposed, and he spoke and voted against Fox's India Bill. When William Pitt accepted the office of Prime Minister, Wilkes transferred to him a support which was continued during the remainder of his parliamentary career. He entertained for Pitt the admiration which he formerly had for Chatham. Writing to his constituents in 1782, he characterised him as "a gentleman of as great abilities, matured even in youth, as this country has at any time produced." One of the last of his parliamentary speeches was delivered in defence of Warren Hastings, with whom he was on terms of intimate friendship, and regarded as a consummate statesman and the saviour of India. He retired from Parliament in 1790.

In 1779 he received the most lucrative and highly coveted gift which the citizens of London can confer, the Chamberlainship of the City. Announcing his appointment to Mr. Petrie, he wrote: "It is a post adequate, after the payment of my debts, to every wish I can form at fifty-three—profit, patronage, and extensive usefulness, with rank and dignity." As Chamberlain. he had to greet the newly-made freemen, among whom were numbered such men as William Pitt and the Marquis of Cornwallis, Earl Howe and Admiral Nelson. His addresses on these

* Speeches, p. 343.

occasions were exceedingly admired at the time, and seem now to have been very well adapted for their purpose, being filled with many appropriate compliments expressed in language neither turgid nor tame, and contrasting most favourably with conventional civic orations.

Throughout life he had a predilection for printing works for private circulation among his friends. The Earl of Bute had a similar taste, and indulged in it after his fall from power. A work on botany in nine volumes, composed by himself, was privately printed at an outlay of 10,000*l*. Exclusive in this, as in other respects, Lord Bute had only twelve copies printed. Latterly, Wilkes confined himself to reproducing editions of classical authors. One of these was the poems of Catullus, which he edited with care: he believed, though without reason, that his edition was wholly free from errors of the press.. Three copies were printed on vellum, and one hundred on fine writing-paper. He next printed an edition of the complete writings of Theophrastus. Presenting a copy of the latter to Lord Mansfield, he received the following acknowledgment:—"Lord Mansfield returns many thanks to Mr. Wilkes for his Theophrastus, and congratulates him upon his elegant amusement. Theophrastus drew so admirably from nature, that his characters live through all times and in every country." Lord Mansfield's delicate irony is not less obvious than the stronger irony of the fact that Wilkes, who, at one time, had denounced him in no measured terms, felt flattered on receiving such a compliment.

In his old age he lived in great comfort, having a

town house in Grosvenor Square, and a cottage at Sandown, in the Isle of Wight, where he spent the summer. Mr. Almon states what other less partial authorities confirm, that he was diligent and regular in the discharge of his official duties. "Perhaps a more punctual, patient, penetrating, and discriminating Chamberlain has not filled the office during the last century. As a magistrate, also, he was equally able, assiduous, candid, and just. In these capacities he has not left a rival." * Shortly before Wilkes's death, Fox introduced his name in a debate on the Treason and Sedition Bills, and used as an argument against them the consequences which might have followed had they been law when Wilkes was tried for libel, adding: "I have not the honour of that gentleman's acquaintance, nor have I, in the course of our political lives, frequently agreed with him in opinion; but now that the intemperance of the time is past, I submit to the House what must be the feeling of every liberal heart at the idea of condemning a person of such high attainments, so dear to the society in which he lives, so exemplary as a magistrate, and who has shown himself to be so zealous a defender of the prerogatives of the Crown, to a punishment so degrading." †

His last public appearance of any importance took place in 1792, when he presided as Alderman at a meeting of the inhabitants of the Ward of Farringdon Without. The declaration of faith he then made, although in accordance with what he had always held, yet differs greatly from what is commonly and

* Memoirs of Wilkes, vol. v. p. 87.
† Fox's Speeches, vol. vi. p. 330.

erroneously supposed to have been his opinions. He stated that he was "a firm friend to a limited monarchy, as a government founded on laws,—a government which does not depend on the will or caprice of an individual, but rests on known and written laws. Such a government best answers the great end designed by it—to give security and safety to persons and to property. This is the government under which we live. . . . . Gentlemen, I am firmly attached to a limited monarchy. I have spent no small part of my life abroad, in countries where the government depended on the will or the caprice of an individual, of a minister, a minion, or a mistress,—where no one was secure. One of the great advantages of our constitution is, that all is clearly defined, and the limits of each branch ascertained. Now in a republican government there is a continual struggle who shall be the greatest. The Roman was the most famous republic, and witnessed the contentions of Marius and Sylla, of Cæsar and Pompey, for pre-eminence; but here the line is clearly chalked out by law,—no subject can with us be so ambitious, or so mad, as to contend for the sovereign power. We are preserved from all those evils which necessarily attend a republican government. On these principles it is that I profess my regard for limited monarchy—a monarchy which is not above law, but is founded upon law, and secures freedom to the subject." *

His last appearance in public was at the general election of 1796. His bitter and unscrupulous enemy, the Rev. Horne Tooke, was then a candidate for the second time to represent Westminster. On the first

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. v. p. 157.

occasion Wilkes voted for him. Now, to use the words of Tooke's biographer, "early on the first day of the poll, the Chamberlain of London appeared in front of the hustings, and, after an elegant compliment to the public virtues, talents, and fortitude of Mr. Horne Tooke, gave him his sole vote."* His last notable official act was to wish Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson joy, on the 28th of November, 1797, at being made an honorary freeman of the City for his victory at Cape St. Vincent.

After a short illness, he died on the 20th of December, 1797, at the age of seventy. He was buried in a vault of Grosvenor Chapel, South Audley Street. In accordance with his express wishes, the coffin was carried by six poor men of the parish, who were recompensed with a guinea each and a suit of clothes. Many bequests which he made, and a provision for a natural son and daughter, could not be defrayed out of his estate, which he had erroneously supposed to have amounted to about 10,000*l.* But his daughter, born in wedlock, who was possessed of ample property in her own right, discharged all these obligations before her own death, which took place suddenly, five years after that of her father.

His personal appearance was not prepossessing; his complexion was sallow, and he squinted. Though not a brilliant orator, yet in conversation he excelled. Dr. Johnson, who detested his principles, was charmed with his wit. When, after some reluctance on Johnson's part, the pair were brought together through Boswell's intervention, the former gave expression to his opinion in these words:—"Jack has a great variety

* Stephen's Memoirs of Horne Tooke, vol. i. p. 229.

of talk, Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman." George the Third, when his hatred of Wilkes was most intense, and when he dreaded to have a personal interview with him, was constrained to admit, after having received him at the head of a deputation from the City, that no one, in a similar situation, had conducted himself with more propriety; "he had never seen so well-bred a Lord Mayor."* Charles Butler and Gibbon both record the pleasure they took in his company. Mr. Almon, who knew him intimately, and who shows no undue desire to extenuate his faults, sums up his character of him in these words:—"His social qualities will live in the esteem of every one who knew him. An uncommon share of wit, an easy and happy flow of language, and a strong memory, all contributed to make his society a truly elegant and classic entertainment to his friends."

* Last Journals of Walpole, vol. i. p. 484.

III.

HIS OPINIONS, CHARACTER, AND SERVICES.

By many writers of eminence, Wilkes is never mentioned except in language of the vilest obloquy. Lord Brougham judged him from Hogarth's caricature, and wrote about his "inhuman squint and demoniac grin." Nothing that was done to injure him has had more effect than the sketch of Hogarth: men look at the sketch and unhesitatingly pronounce the subject of it a villain. Wilkes, who had been the friend and was the warm admirer of the artist, justly said that such a pencil as Hogarth's should "speak to all ages and to all nations," and not "be dipped in the dirt of a faction of a day." Moreover, he displayed at once good nature and good sense by writing as follows with regard to this pictorial attempt to vilify him:— "It must be allowed to be an excellent compound caricature, or, rather, a caricature of what Nature had already caricatured. I know but one apology to be made for this gentleman, or, to speak more properly, for the *person* of Mr. Wilkes; it is, that he did not make himself, and that he never was solicitous about the *case* of his soul (as Shakespeare calls it), only so far as to keep it clean and in health. I never heard that he once hung over the glassy stream, like another Narcissus, admiring the image in it, nor that he ever

stole an amorous look at his counterfeit in a side mirror. His form, such as it is, ought to give him no pain, while it is capable of giving so much pleasure to others. I believe that he finds himself tolerably happy in the *clay* cottage to which he is *tenant for life*, because he had learned to keep it in pretty good order, while the share of health and animal spirits which Heaven has given him should hold out. I can scarcely imagine he will be one moment peevish about the outside of so precarious, so temporary a habitation; or will ever be brought to own *ingenium Galbæ male habitat—Monsieur est mal logé.*" *

Earl Russell, a less impulsive writer and a much sounder critic than Brougham, has said: "No man can now consider Wilkes as anything but a profligate spendthrift, without opinions or principles, religious or political; whose impudence far exceeded his talents, and who always meant licence when he cried liberty." † It is possible that Wilkes was a hypocrite from first to last, just as it is possible that every man is a liar at heart. But to affirm this, as Earl Russell does, is not enough. Evidence of some value should be adduced to support the charge that the great agitator of the Eighteenth century was in every respect unprincipled, and in every particular an impostor. Taking his private utterances as fairer tests of his real opinions than any public declarations, the result is the reverse of unfavourable to him.

To Earl Temple he wrote, while the proceedings in the case of the *North Briton* were pending: "I have never lost sight of the great object of the liberty of the

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. iii., p. 25.
† Introduction to the Bedford Correspondence, vol. iii., p. 52.

subject at large." "I hope, within a fortnight, to congratulate your lordship, and every true lover of liberty, on the explicit declaration of a court of justice in favour of the liberty of the subject." He certainly showed an accurate perception of the nature and result of his labours when he stated: "*North Briton* and Wilkes will be talked of together by posterity, and the work is, I believe, the most just and animated account of last year's politics at home." "I have this cause at heart, and I feel the spirit of Hampden in it, but I have not his fortune." "Though the public fail me, I will never be wanting to them, and I shall have only to say in the end, *Il est grand, il est beau, de faire des ingrats.*" "I mean to lay the present age under a real obligation in the most darling cause to an Englishman; and, however I may suffer myself, the faithful historian's page and posterity will do me justice. There I keep my eye steadily fixed."*

Lest it should be thought that even the private correspondence with Earl Temple is no criterion of the true sentiments of Wilkes, I may quote a few sentences from his correspondence with his daughter, towards whom he was not more uniformly affectionate than unreserved and confidential. After Luttrell had been improperly declared to be member for Middlesex, he wrote: "Lord Chatham was great on Tuesday. I have not yet been at either House, to avoid every pretence of a riot, or influencing their debates by a mob." Having visited Torbay during an excursion in 1772, he landed at Brixham, which, he tells his daughter, is "the place where King William landed. I was ready to fall on my knees on the sacred spot;

* Grenville Papers, vol. ii. pp. 60-75, 138, 139.

and could scarcely leave the holy steps on which he landed to rescue a wretched people from slavery to the Stuarts. I was provoked to find no pyramid, obelisk, nor the least public memorial on such a spot; but I hope the memory of that event is engraven on the hearts of the people, who seem to me in that part of Devonshire very staunch to the cause of liberty." *

To us, the foregoing expressions appear hyperbolical. Yet they might have been uttered in all sincerity a century ago. At that time the Revolution was regarded by every man of liberal opinions as a mighty and recent deliverance; just as the rising of the Highlanders in 1745 was felt to have been an imminent and terrible danger. A firm believer in a limited monarchy, such as had been established at the Revolution, Wilkes could not but rejoice at the advent of William and the discomfiture of Charles Stuart. Any dislike which he entertained for George the Third was inspired by a fear lest the latter might walk in the footsteps of the exiled dynasty after he had extended open favour to its avowed partisans. With the monarch he had no quarrel; for the man he had little reverence. In a letter to Earl Temple, written when he first heard that George the Third disapproved of his course, he said: "I hear from all hands that the King is enraged at my insolence, as he terms it: I regard not his frowns or his smiles. I will ever be his faithful subject, never his servant." † Writing to Junius in 1771, he says, "Lord Chatham said to me ten years ago '[the King] is the falsest hypocrite in Europe.' I must hate

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. iv., p. 111.
† Grenville Papers, vol. ii. p. 75.

the man as much as even Junius can, for throughout this whole reign almost it has been [*the King*] *versus Wilkes.* This conduct will probably make it *Wilkes versus* [*the King*]." *

To pronounce a panegyric upon Wilkes because others have reviled him, would be a piece of absurdity not unprecedented, yet utterly inexcusable. He was neither a perfect man nor a perfect monster. In his life, which was not that of an ascetic, and in his actions, which were not always defensible, he was but a type of the society wherein he moved, and a natural product of the age in which he lived. One of his misfortunes was to be frequently in debt; in this matter, however, he erred no more grievously than great statesmen whom we delight to honour; Chatham and William Pitt, Edmund Burke and Charles James Fox. Another shortcoming was proneness to free talk and loose living; in this, too, he was no worse than Sir Robert Walpole and Henry Fox, Lord Chesterfield and Lord Sandwich, Lord Chancellor Northington and Lord Chancellor Thurlow, while he was a pattern of purity compared with that polished gentleman, George, Prince of Wales. Gibbon, who, in his autobiography, reprehends the tendency of Wilkes to unclean speech, has demonstrated, by many an allusion and many a footnote in his great history, that his own mind dwelt frequently on impure and unsavoury topics. Lord March, who exerted himself to obtain a proof-sheet of the *Essay on Woman*, in order that he might curry favour with the Court and the Government by furnishing a plausible pretext for prosecuting Wilkes as the printer and publisher, was himself the most systematic

* Letters of Junius, vol. i. p. 304.

corruptor of female innocence, and the most thorough-paced rascal of the century.

The personal shortcomings of Wilkes were perfectly well known to his contemporaries, yet they availed nothing in lessening his popularity among the great bulk of the people. Some persons, indeed, tried to disparage him by contrasting his private life with his public professions. The reply made at the time by Junius was accepted by all sensible men as conclusive, nor has its force and appositeness been weakened by time: "It is not necessary to exact from Mr. Wilkes the virtues of a stoic. They were inconsistent with themselves, who, almost at the same moment, represented him as the basest of mankind, yet seemed to expect from him such instances of fortitude and self-denial as would do honour to an apostle. It is not, however, flattery to say that he is obstinate, intrepid, and fertile in expedients. That he has no possible resource but in the public favour, is, in my judgment, a considerable recommendation of him. I wish that every man who pretended to popularity were in the same predicament. I wish that a retreat to St. James's were not so easy and open as patriots have found it."*

Those who deny that he performed any service for which his country ought to be grateful, and those who eulogize him as a patriot of the purest water, equally misapprehend his real position and misconstrue his actual achievements. That a man of the most dispicable and abandoned character should for many years have waged a bitter and, in the end, a triumphant contest with the Court, with successive Ministries, and with the Legislature, simply to gratify his personal

* Letters of Junius, vol. ii. p. 437.

malice and to gain a purely personal victory, is absurd and preposterous. A modern Jack Cade may deliver many silly and illogical speeches and do some violent and stupid things, but his career will necessarily be brief and his cause abortive. A mere agitator like Horne Tooke or Tom Paine can easily produce a temporary excitement in the public mind and a momentary annoyance in ministerial circles. Yet, in this country, the utmost power of a demagogue is but a figment, should it solely depend upon individual prepossessions and personal antipathies. Had the aim of Wilkes been to make a position for himself by writing and speaking against the Government, and to make money out of sham patriotism, he would have been the scandalous hero of the hour, a Dyson or a Rigby, a Barrington or a Dundas, but would never have risen to be the leader of a strong party, and the most useful man in the kingdom. Personally he was subordinate to his cause. The cause of which he became the champion was really that of the nation. He might never have filled a niche in history, if George the Third had chosen to rule in the true spirit of the Constitution, and if the Earl of Bute and Lord North had been in policy and at heart constitutional Ministers.

Had Bute been another Strafford in capacity, as he was in inclination, Wilkes's denunciations would not have been fatal to him. The Favourite, however, was bold in planning and headstrong in advising, but weak and timorous in action. The sound made by his own policy affrighted him. He shrank at the decisive moment from giving effect to his convictions. With a circulation greater than any periodical since the *Craftsman*, the *North Briton*, though edited by a man the

intellectual inferior of Bolingbroke, yet exercised an influence and achieved a success for which Bolingbroke would have made any sacrifice. Public opinion, moulded, concentrated, and inflamed by articles in the *North Briton*, manifested, with unmistakable emphasis, detestation of Bute as a statesman and a Minister; Lord Bute reluctantly bowed his head and resigned office. Nevertheless, the authority wielded by Wilkes over his contemporaries would have been impotent to effect any change, his denunciation of the treaty of Paris, and his invectives against the Scotch, would have fallen flat, had not the readers of his articles been predisposed to admire and approve of them. Politically, he was little more than the conductor of an electric current; the electricity which produced the shock had been previously stored and was ready to flash into action.

When the results of his onslaught on unconstitutional rulers became apparent, when the ministerial efforts to take revenge upon him became known, he was the object of sympathy because he had acted in alliance with the people, and was commonly regarded as a martyr in the most holy of causes to Englishmen, the cause of constitutional government and of free speech. His committal to the Tower under a General Warrant was rightly believed to be as high-handed a measure as the attempted arrest of the five members and the actual arrest of the seven bishops, as any deed of royal violence and oppression for which Charles the First expired on the scaffold and James the Second died in exile at St. Germains.

John Wilkes was not the first man illegally apprehended and unjustifiably maltreated under a General Warrant, any more than John Hampden was the first

man improperly summoned to pay Ship-Money. Nearly fifty of these warrants had been wrongfully issued by different Secretaries of State since the expiry, in 1695, of the Act imposing a censorship on the Press and placing printers and publishers at the mercy of a Secretary of State. Hundreds of men who had printed or published something of which the Government disapproved had been taken into custody under a General Warrant, cast into prison, prosecuted without possibility of making a defence that would satisfy the Court, ruined without hope of redress. So tyrannically had this organized baiting of unhappy and often innocent printers and publishers been conducted, that it was with extreme difficulty Wilkes could induce any publisher to issue the *North Briton*.

Had he tamely yielded to fate, and borne his sentence without murmuring, it is hard to say how far such a precedent would have extended the usurped practice of muzzling the unofficial and independent Press. The manly resistance of Wilkes was applauded all the more loudly because so many had unjustly suffered before he was attacked. Those who had been torn from their families by officers armed with a General Warrant; who had chafed under the punishment; who had been irretrievably injured in reputation, and reduced to beggary along with all who were most dear to them, could not too vehemently praise the first daring man who made a successful resistance, and who, by his resistance, had enabled others to breathe freely and pursue their lawful avocations in security. Just as there was a public opinion awaiting the watchword to condemn Lord Bute and his system, so there was an opinion

ready to take active form when Wilkes demonstrated that Lord Halifax had violated the law in sending him to the Tower and seizing his papers. For his condemnation of General Warrants, Pitt was made the heir to the estate of Burton Pynsent by an utter stranger. The reward of Wilkes for a more genuine service in the cause of freedom was to be cheered by the admiring multitude, and to be mercilessly reviled and systematically persecuted by all who professed to be the King's best friends.

Not less useful than the liberty of printing, which Wilkes conquered for the Press in the discussion of current politics, was the freedom which, through his instrumentality, the Press acquired to report Parliamentary debates. It is difficult to believe now that the machinery of legislation and government ever worked smoothly and efficiently without the publication of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament. To deliver a studied oration to a select and secret assembly is an exercise of talent and a display of rhetorical skill, but nothing more. This, however, was deemed deliberating by our forefathers, and in consequence of legislation being conducted in seclusion, the Ministry could corrupt the House of Commons, and the Crown could control the Ministry to an extent wholly impossible when all acts performed, and all words spoken, are done and uttered, as it were, in the presence of the entire nation. The members of both Houses of the Legislature were conscious that recklessness and intemperance in speech and conduct must be bridled if the public became witnesses of their deliberations. Hence their wrath against the printers who first mirrored their proceed-

ings for the information of the people. The reporters of those days worked in constant terror lest they should be ruthlessly punished for breaches of privilege. The hirelings of power went scot free, while the unpurchaseable pens were imprisoned. It was Wilkes who instigated the last great struggle in this country when the House of Commons desired to act as arbitrarily as the Star Chamber in persecuting the printers of newspapers. Owing to his sagacity and firmness the printers gained the day. The Commons have never rescinded their resolution against news-writers; yet a century has elapsed since to report the debates has entailed punishment for a breach of privilege. If the Reporters' Gallery were now to remain untenanted for a night while the House is sitting, complaints as bitter as those made in 1771 by Colonel Onslow would be uttered against the conductors of the Press, for failing in their self-imposed duty to Parliament and the public. To no one man does the public owe regular acquaintance with the performances of their representatives in Parliament, and members of Parliament their power to refer to and quote the volumes of "Hansard," so much as to John Wilkes.

A charge made against his consistency is frequently cited as a proof of his real worthlessness. It is based on the two following anecdotes told in the *Life of Lord Eldon*. One day George the Third, addressing Wilkes, and referring to Mr. Serjeant Glynn as his political friend, was answered, "Oh, no, sir, he was a Wilkite, which I never was!" Once, as Wilkes was walking in Covent Garden, a market-woman recognising him, called out, "Wilkes and Liberty,"

whereupon he said, "Stop, you old fool! that's over long ago."

Both anecdotes may be literally true, yet they in nowise justify the conclusion that he was an unprincipled quack. Not a sentence he ever penned or spoke marks him as a possible revolutionist, or even as an extreme reformer. He was perfectly satisfied with the Constitution as established at the Revolution. He was ready to amend it, but its principle he wished to preserve. If he opposed the Crown and stood forth as the champion of liberty, it was because he believed that the Crown designed to subvert the principle of the Constitution, to gag liberty, and render another revolution imperative. But some who acted with him were anxious to disestablish the Crown and to supersede the Constitution. In their mouths liberty meant an equivalent for anarchy. An exact parallel has been witnessed in our own day. Many persons were once betrayed by misjudging passion into thinking that, of all our public men, the most extreme and dangerous, the most radical in politics and the most reprehensible in his aims, the fiercest enemy of the monarchy and the uncompromising friend of democracy, was the great orator and sober-minded statesman, John Bright. When, in burning words, he denounced those who withheld the franchise from millions of honest citizens, and when he laboured with unabated energy to render the House of Commons a faithful reflex of the nation's mind, he was cheered and followed by hundreds who wished to accomplish all that he desired, and much of which he had never dreamed. His name has been invoked, without his sanction, in support of levelling schemes he abhorred. Those who

did so might profess to be his disciples, but of them he might say that he, for one, was never a Brightite, with as great truth and propriety as Wilkes told George the Third that "Mr. Serjeant Glynn was a Wilkite, which he never was."

Nor does the other anecdote prove anything except the bad faith of those who retail it in support of a senseless accusation. When General Warrants had been solemnly pronounced illegal by a court of justice, and formally condemned by the House of Commons; when newspapers were suffered to record Parliamentary proceedings without interference; when the outrage perpetrated upon the rights of electors in his person had been partially condoned by Wilkes being allowed to take his seat unchallenged as member for Middlesex, and was deprived of all mischief as a precedent by the resolutions relating to it being expunged from the Journals of the House; when the work of Wilkes had been finished, and he was, in his own most expressive phrase, "a fire burnt out," it was sheer mockery to raise the cry of "Wilkes and Liberty," and it was the simple truth to say all that was "over long ago."

To the close of his life he had devoted adherents. By members of the Whig party, however, he was ridiculed in later years for having deserted their side; the truth being that he had always been a Whig of the school of Pitt, and had never identified himself with the school of which the Marquess of Rockingham was the head and Charles James Fox the most powerful exponent. When he voted in Parliament against them, they held him up to opprobrium as a renegade. In 1790, a pasquinade, written by

Sheridan, Tickell, and Lord John Townshend, contains the following lines which express rudely, but clearly, the prevailing Whig view:

> "Johnny Wilkes, Johnny Wilkes,
> Thou greatest of bilks,
> How changed are the notes you now sing:
> Your famed Forty-five
> Is prerogative,
> And your blasphemy, 'God save the King,'
> Johnny Wilkes,
> And your blasphemy, 'God save the King.'"

His admirers went to the opposite extreme. A gentleman framed as precious relics the buttons which, when he fought a duel with Martin, diverted the bullet, and hindered his wound from proving mortal. On the case containing them were inscribed the following words: "These two simple yet invaluable buttons, under Providence, preserved the life of my beloved and honest friend, John Wilkes, in a duel fought with Mr. Martin on the 16th of November, 1763, when true courage and humanity distinguished him in a manner scarcely known to former ages. His invincible bravery, as well in the field as in the glorious assertion of the liberty of his fellow-subjects, will deliver him down, an unparalleled example of public virtue, to all future generations." Another instance of the tendency to see everything that was good in him was given in a conversation between two women: "One said he squinted; t' other replied, 'Squints! well, if he does, it is not more than a man should squint.'"* This feminine decision, absurd as it may appear, is paralleled by what Burke said of Windham; "He is just as he should be. If I were

* Walpole's Letters, vol. v., p. 372.

Windham this minute, I should not wish to be thinner nor fatter, nor taller nor shorter, nor in any way, nor in anything, altered." *

The truth is that the admirers and the abhorrers of Wilkes both indulged in unreasonable exaggeration. If the one side shouted "noble patriot," the other replied "vile incendiary;" when by the one he was hailed as the angel of liberty, by the other he was execrated as the demon of license. He shocked the Tories by his audacity, and the Whigs by despising their measures. Writers from whom a cool survey and a just conclusion might have been expected, pronounce his career a public scandal. In this respect, the Whigs have acted more discreditably than the Tories. Earl Russell and Lord Brougham have tried to gibbet his memory. In a moment of rhetorical heat Brougham depicted him as a monster whose ugly features were in perfect keeping with his vile mind. Moreover, he charged Wilkes with administering the sacrament to an ape. For this accusation he cited no authority. In the *Oxford Magazine* for 1771, when Wilkes was shielding the printers of newspapers from the vengeance of an irate House of Commons, Lord Sandwich is named among the friends of his opponents as one "who administered, with all the forms of religious ceremony, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to a dog." To substitute an ape for a dog, and the name of Wilkes for that of Sandwich, appears to have been the not very difficult, but most malignant feat of Brougham.

This strikingly proves how easy it is to create an

* Memoirs of Dr. Burney, by Madame d'Arblay, vol. iii. p. 168.

imaginary Wilkes. A strong phrase often passes current as the image of a man; Sir Robert Walpole is commonly referred to as the utterer of an immoral sentiment which never passed his lips. In the same way that a caricature of Wilkes has taken the place of the real personage, a caricature of Byron, representing him as living the worst lives of his worst characters, was once accepted as a true picture of the poet, and is still thought by credulous and ill-informed persons to be drawn from life. Both have had to bear the sins of their neighbours in addition to their own. It may be, as has been asserted, that Wilkes is the Cleon of the Eighteenth century; if so, he is not the Cleon of Mitford, but the Cleon of Grote.

It would be idle to maintain that he was an exceptionally good man like Hampden, or such a model patriot as Marvell. He was no paragon of morality. In one particular, however, he was superior to his contemporaries; to the common vice of gaming he was not addicted. He mentions the fashionable game of Faro only to say that he detests it, "as well as every other kind of gaming."* When a youth, he was tempted to engage in play on one occasion and lost five hundred guineas. His father paid the debt and said to him, "Jack, mind you do so no more." He promised he would never offend again, and "never afterwards touched a die or a card."† That he had a taste for other vices is beyond dispute. While not concurring with Mandeville in holding private vices to be public benefits, I hold that public

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. iii., p. 127.

† Foot-note by the Editor of Letters to his Daughter, vol. ii., p. 217.

benefits are not wholly neutralized by private vices. Contemporaries of Wilkes who were high in favour with their sovereign, Lord Sandwich and Lord Le Despencer, Lord Weymouth and Lord March, were pre-eminent among the drunkards and profligates of the age; not one of them could claim mitigation of censure on the ground of a single benefit conferred upon the public. They have not, however, been cast to the lions along with Wilkes; on the contrary, their interested devotion to the King has been favourably compared with the generous ardour of Wilkes in suffering for the people. He has been maligned as a self-seeking demagogue; they, and others like unto them, have had their vices extenuated and their services magnified. Yet the so-called demagogue was the true friend of order. The really dangerous revolutionists were to be found in the ranks of Ministries and surrounding the throne; the worst of all wore the Crown.

His contemporaries, although they differed as to the value of his services, yet concurred in allowing him to have no living superior as a wit. One of them tells us, "he abounded in anecdote; wit was so constantly at his command that wagers have been gained, that, from the time he quitted his home near Storey's Gate, till he reached Guildhall, no one would address him, who would leave him without a smile or a hearty laugh." * He was endowed with a gift which is so un-English that an exact equivalent for it does not exist in our language, which the French call "*Esprit*," and of which the English representative is what the vulgar call chaff, which is "*Esprit*" in the rough.

* Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i. p. 75.

Pages might be filled with the clever sayings attributed to Wilkes, and pages of discussion would be necessary to settle their authenticity. Many things which were palpable hits and excellent jokes a century ago, appear pointless and silly now. Yet it can be imagined that at a City banquet, where a little wit goes a very long way, the remark which set his hearers in a roar, would not fail of success if repeated again. Mr. Alderman Burnell, who had begun life as a bricklayer, having a soft pudding to help, and doing it clumsily with a spoon, Wilkes advised him "to take a trowel to it." In a chop-house, a rude-mannered customer annoyed the other customers by impatiently shouting for his steak; Wilkes observed on its being set before him, "Usually the bear is brought to the stake, here the steak is brought to the bear." Lord Sandwich asking him whether he thought he should die of a certain contagious disease or on the scaffold? He replied, "That depends, my lord, whether I embrace your principles or your mistress!" Hearing Lord Thurlow, who was then suspected of faithlessness to the King, exclaim in the House of Lords, "When I forget my King, may my God forget me," Pitt remarked, "Oh, the rascal;" Burke said, "The best thing that can happen to you;" while Wilkes's comment was, "He'll see you damned first." Lord Eldon, recording that the respectable Company of Merchant Tailors had honoured him with the freedom of their company, adds, "their motto is, '*Concordiâ parvæ res crescunt.*' That wicked wag, John Wilkes, construed these words thus:—'Nine tailors make a man.'"* In a letter to his daughter, Wilkes gives, as

* Life of Lord Eldon, vol. ii., p. 251.

an example of wit, as neat a saying as any of those attributed to him. Mr. Conway, looking at a furnished house to be let, "saw a pretty servant-maid, whom he asked if she was to be let too, as well as the house?' She answered, 'No, sir, I am to be let alone.'"* His reputation as a wit was not confined to one language, or to this country. In France he was numbered among sayers of good things at a time when to make a clever epigram was to achieve fame. Some of his sayings in French are repeated and admired to this day.†

That he was a fascinating associate cannot be doubted. Gibbon was struck with his talk and his knowledge. Charles Butler says that he was a delightful companion, and that "he was highly respected and loved" by all who knew him in private life.‡ Samuel Rogers records that "he was very gentlemanly in appearance and manners."§ His pleasant tongue charmed away the prejudices of Dr. Johnson. Hannah More thought him "very entertaining" in conversation.‖ He was the subject of the following eulogium from Lord Mansfield, who, dining with Mr. Strahan in 1783, and the name of Wilkes being mentioned, said "Mr. Wilkes was the pleasantest companion, the politest gentleman, and the best scholar he knew."¶

Wilkes anticipated that "the faithful historian's page and posterity would do him justice." Hitherto,

* Letters to his Daughter, vol. iii., p. 185.

† M. Louis Blanc informs me that he has heard the following two lines by Wilkes repeated with a smile:—

"Ces brigands de Français dont les sanglant couteaux
Coupent la tête aux rois et la queue aux chevaux."

‡ Reminiscences, vol. i., p. 77.

§ Dyce's Recollections, p. 43.

‖ Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. ii., p. 109.

¶ Memoir prefixed to Letters to his Daughter, vol. i., p. 163.

the historian's page has contained many scandalous and exaggerated stories about his career, and many gross aspersions on his character. Chroniclers of his doings have not veiled their disappointment at being unable to record that his end was to rot in a gaol or swing from a gibbet. They evidently think it unseemly that Wilkes should have departed this life amidst the affection of attached friends and the unfeigned regret of old enemies whose rancour had been transmuted into respect. Hence they have deemed it their duty to calumniate his memory, attenuate whatever was most honourable in his conduct, underrate or decry his personal share in upholding a glorious cause. Instead of being treated with common justice, he has been treated as a scape-goat. Posterity has been taught to consider him as nothing but a charlatan, with as much propriety as posterity was taught in the Middle Ages to regard Virgil as nothing but a magician. His last wish was that his tombstone should be inscribed with the words "A Friend to Liberty." Many whose remains have been carried in state to Westminster Abbey, and repose there under splendid monuments, have had falser and less merited epitaphs. Granting it to be true, as his traducers allege, that in professing attachment to liberty he was but acting a part, it is undeniable that his part was a most useful one, and that his performance has proved his country's gain. In consideration of the value of the result, an enlightened posterity may well refrain from applying a microscope to his motives and a magnifying glass to his faults, and fittingly render to his actual achievements a tribute of gratitude and approval.

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

—•—

Lord Byron wrote in his Diary on the 18th December, 1813, "Whatever Sheridan has done or chosen to do has been, *par excellence*, the *best* of its kind. He has written the *best* comedy ('School for Scandal'); the *best* opera ('The Duenna'—in my mind far before that of St. Giles's lampoon, 'The Beggar's Opera'); the *best* farce ('The Critic'—it is only too good for an after-piece); and the *best* address (Monologue on Garrick); and to crown all, delivered the very *best* oration (the famous Begum speech) ever conceived or heard in this country." The foregoing opinions were expressed in the presence of Lord Holland and others, who reported them to Sheridan. Hearing that the gratification of the latter had affected him even to tears, Byron added :—"Poor Brinsley! if they are tears of pleasure, I would rather have said those few, but sincere, words, than have written an *Iliad*, or made his now celebrated philippic. Nay, his own comedy never gratified me more than to hear he had derived a moment's gratification from any praise of mine—humble as it may appear to 'my elders or betters.'"

Byron was a great poet, a staunch friend, a good hater, and a bad critic. He was so unmeasured in praising those whom he preferred, that his eulogiums must generally be taken subject to material qualifications.

Yet, in the case of Sheridan as an orator, he is not singular in his laudation. Referring to the speech at the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Gibbon wrote in his wonted grand style:—"Mr. Sheridan's eloquence demanded my applause." Burke declared that the speech on the Begum Charge was the most astonishing effort of eloquence, argument, and wit united, of which there was any record or tradition." Pitt said that speech "surpassed all the eloquence of ancient and modern times; and possessed everything that genius or art could furnish to agitate the human mind." Fox testified that all "he had ever heard, all he had ever read, when compared with it, dwindled into nothing, and vanished like vapour before the sun." Nor was Sheridan's personal career wanting in incident and interest. As dramatist, orator, and active member of the Liberal Opposition combined, he had no parallel during the reign of George the Third.

I.

LIFE AND WRITINGS.

THE ancestors of Sheridan were noted for their intellect and eccentricity. His grandfather was an intimate friend of Swift. The Dean of St. Patrick's gave his friend a living, but could not teach him prudence. He was a chaplain to the Lord Lieutenant, and preached a sermon on the birthday of the representative of royalty, taking as a text, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." His name was afterwards expunged from the list of Court Chaplains. Lord Cork characterizes him as "a punster, a quibbler, a fiddler, and a wit. . . . His pen and fiddlestick were in continual motion, and yet to little or no purpose." He died in penury, leaving behind him a son who had received a fair education, who was obliged to go on the stage for a subsistence, and who, when he had made a name as an actor, thought himself the equal of Garrick. From George the Second he received a pension of £300 a-year, which enabled him to devote his time to the great project of refining the manners and morals of the age by teaching elocution to young men. *A Pronouncing Dictionary* which he published, his acting, his elocutionary panacea, gave him notoriety, while his lectures added to his income. They were filled with paradoxes. Hannah More has left this account of him as a lecturer: "He was sensible,

but pedantic as usual. He abused all the English poets, because none of them *had written to the heart.*"* He wrote a bad farce called *Captain O'Blunder.* He enjoyed some reflected glory from his wife, who was a successful writer of novels and comedies. Mrs. Sheridan's romance of *Nourjahad* was thought worthy of translation into French; her novel, *Sydney Biddulph,* was pronounced by Fox one of the best of the century; her comedy, *The Discovery,* was a favourite with the public.

Richard Brinsley Butler Sheridan was the second son of these accomplished parents, and was born in Dublin in September, 1751. Along with his elder brother Charles, he received the elements of education from Mr. White, afterwards the early teacher of Thomas Moore, and who, though an experienced and discerning man, could detect no promise in Richard Sheridan, pronouncing him "a most impenetrable dunce." His father concurred in this decision; Thomas, the dullest of his children, he loved the best, and regarded as the genius of the family. When Sheridan was twelve, his parents removed to England, his father thinking that country a much wider and more promising field than Ireland wherein to regenerate his fellow-men through the medium of elocution. His son Richard never revisited his native land. He was sent to Harrow, where he remained till the age of eighteen. He was very popular with his schoolfellows; none could excel him in robbing an orchard or in neglecting lessons. Dr. Sumner, the headmaster, and Dr. Parr, one of the under-masters, both perceived that he could distinguish himself in school

* Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. i., p. 395.

if he would but try, and they urged him to do justice to his talents. Their expostulations had no effect; he preferred play to books, and left school with the minimum of acquired learning. His father could not afford to send him to the University, so that he went to live with his parents at Bath, where they were temporarily residing.

Although young Sheridan had no other advantages than those of a pleasing presence and a ready wit, he yet succeeded in entering the best society of Bath. At that time, Bath was fashionable London in miniature. People of position and fortune, who had lost their health, or who were simply in quest of variety and excitement, went to Bath as their successors go to Baden, Homburg, Nice, or the Nile. At this watering-place, the line of demarcation between the high-born and the lowly sojourner was less clearly drawn than in the capital; a handsome person, polished manners, a fluent tongue, or even fine clothes, were much better recommendations for admission into the small and unrestrained circles of Bath than into the larger and more exclusive circles of London. Adventurers found opportunities there which they could not enjoy elsewhere. Rich and ambitious widows went to Bath in the hope of capturing titled, if poor, husbands. Gentlemen possessing more audacity than money went thither to entrap heiresses. The hypochondriac went to get rid of imaginary ailments; the cripple from gout and rheumatism went to leave his crutches behind him; the fortune-hunter often returned a husband and a man of substance; the rich spinster or widow often returned miserable and a wife.

No other town in England has ever enjoyed, or

may again acquire, such a reputation as Bath then had as a sanatorium for ailing statesmen, politicians, authors, and authoresses. Hither came, for rest after toil, or to take the mineral waters, the men most conspicuous in our history since the Revolution —Pulteney, Chesterfield, Bolingbroke, and Chatham; John Wilkes, Charles James Fox, William Pitt, and Edmund Burke. The learned Mrs. Carter, the clever Mrs. Montagu, the fascinating Mrs. Thrale, the sensible and serious Hannah More, the discerning Fanny Burney, all visited Bath either for health or pleasure, or for health and pleasure combined. A little lame boy was brought to this place, in order that his withered leg might be made whole. He left it with his infirmity uncured. Though but six years old, he was regarded as a remarkable child by strangers who made his acquaintance. His name was Walter Scott.

Lady Miller was a resident in the neighbourhood of Bath whose acquaintance was greatly sought after, and whose circle was opened to Sheridan. She had travelled in Italy and written a dry narrative of her experiences; she aspired to be the patroness of rising genius and professed to be a judge of poetry. She assembled round her, at her villa of Bath Easton, all the well-connected and well-bred persons of either sex who thought that they had talents, who fancied they could write poetry, and who wished to shine. In a letter to Lady Aylesbury, the "Puppet Parnassus" of Lady Miller is thus described by that incomparable letter-writer, accomplished poetaster, and inimitable retailer of scandal, Horace Walpole:— "You must know, Madam, there is erected a new Parnassus, composed of three laurels, a myrtle-tree, a

weeping-willow, and a view of the Avon, which has now been christened Helicon. Ten years ago there lived a Madam Riggs, an old rough humourist, who passed for a wit; her daughter, who passed for nothing, was married to a Captain Miller, full of good-natured officiousness. These good folks were friends of Miss Rich, who carried me to dine at Bath Easton, now Pindus. They caught a little of what was then called taste, built and planted, and begot children, till the whole caravan was forced to go abroad to retrieve. Alas! Mrs. Miller is returned a beauty, a genius, a Sappho, a tenth Muse, as recondite as Mademoiselle de Scuderi, and as sophisticated as Mrs. Vesey. The captain's fingers are loaded with cameos, and his tongue runs over with *virtù;* and that both may contribute to the improvement of their own country, they have introduced *bout-rimés* as a new discovery. They hold a Parnassus fair every Thursday, give out rhymes and themes, and all the flux of quality at Bath contend for the prizes. A Roman vase, dressed with pink ribbons and myrtles, receives the poetry, which is drawn out every festival; six judges of these Olympic games retire and select the brightest compositions, which the respective successful acknowledge, kneel to Mrs. Calliope Miller, kiss her fair hand, and are crowned by it with—I don't know what. You may think this a fiction, or exaggeration. Be dumb, unbelievers! The collection is printed—published. Yes, on my faith, there are *bout-rimés* on a buttered muffin made by her Grace the Duchess of Northumberland; receipts to make them by Corydon the venerable, *alias* George Pitt; others, very pretty, by Lord Palmerston; some by Lord Carlisle; many by Mrs.

Miller herself, that have no fault but wanting metre —an immortality promised to her without end or measure." *

The probabilities are that Walpole competed for a prize and failed to obtain one. His account of Bath Easton is more than a caricature and less than the truth. Doubtless he paid his hostess many mock compliments which she accepted as genuine, and thought the proud possessor of Strawberry Hill enchanted, when he was actually quizzing her. Miss Fanny Burney's sketch of the same place, written in 1780, is apparently more trustworthy:—"Do you know that, notwithstanding Bath Easton is so much laughed at in London, nothing here is more tonish than to visit Lady Miller, who is extremely curious in her company, admitting few people who are not of rank or fame, and excluding of those who are not people of character very unblemished. . . . Lady Miller is a round, plump, coarse-looking dame of about forty, and while her aim is to appear an elegant woman of fashion, all her success is to seem an ordinary woman in very common life, with fine clothes on. Her manners are bustling, her air is mock-important, and her manners very inelegant. So much for the lady of Bath Easton; who, however, seems extremely good-natured, and who is, I am sure, extremely civil." † In this set, Sheridan gained many a prize, and had an opportunity of studying human foibles and eccentricities. For the future playwright, it was an excellent school.‡

* Horace Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's edition, vol. vi., p. 172.

† Madame d'Arblay's Diary, vol. i., p. 365.

‡ Writing to his daughter from Bath on the 9th of January, 1779, Wilkes says: "Thursday was Sir John Miller's masquerade at his

Not having been destined for any profession, yet finding it necessary to seek a livelihood, he followed the course which seems natural to those whose ready money is their mother-wit, and whose leisure is unlimited. He aspired to earn an income and fame by his pen. In concert with his friend Halhed, who had been his companion at Harrow, who was now studying at Oxford, and who afterwards rose to eminence as an Indian judge and an expounder of Hindoo law, he planned a burlesque for the stage. The title was *Jupiter*. A considerable portion of it was composed, but the work was never completed. One of the mock-heroic lines resembles the declamatory phrases in which popular American orators afterwards bragged about "whipping creation:"—"Courage, Ixion flogs the world to tatters." A weekly journal, after the fashion of *The Spectator*, next occupied the minds of these young and sanguine projectors. They finally selected a scheme which appeared to them far less hazardous and chimerical than any which had occurred to them, and far better fitted for making their fortunes. This was to translate into English verse the flowery and deservedly forgotten prose of the Greek writer Aristænetus. The translation was made and published; the authors had to console themselves for the pecuniary failure of their venture with the conjecture of a foolish

Bath Easton *villakin*, and it is said, the following lines were found on his gate:—

> 'Wedded to vanity here folly reigns,
> And sense, and taste, and virtue, holds in chains,
> O'er crescent, circus, both parades, she rules,
> And here has fixed the *Paradise of Fools*.
> Sir John, high priest at Folly's favourite shrine,
> And here his *Fat*ima high priestess shine.'

Lady Miller was to appear as the Sultana queen Fatima, and she cannot bear to be thought fat." Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 146.

critic that the translator was Dr. Armstrong or Dr. Johnson.

While Sheridan and Halhed were partners in a literary undertaking, they were rivals in love. Both had seen and lost their hearts to Miss Linley, then the loveliest and most popular of public singers, the fashionable toast in many a convivial meeting, and the Queen of Beauty for whose hand many suitors competed. Writing to his daughter from Bath in 1772, Wilkes says :—"I have passed an evening with Mr. Brereton's family and the two Misses Linley. The eldest I think still superior to all the handsome things I have heard of her. She does not seem in the least spoiled by the idle talk of our sex, and is the most modest, pleasing, delicate flower I have seen for a great while: the youngest a mere coquette, no sentiment." * The most romantic and generous of her admirers was Mr. Long, an elderly gentleman of fortune. His addresses were warmly encouraged by her father; she herself was ready to yield to his entreaties. Telling him, however, that though she might give him her hand, she could not give her heart also, Mr. Long refrained from pressing his suit; and, to hinder her father from complaining, as well as in order to testify his regard, he settled on Miss Linley the sum of £3000.

A lover of a very different type was Captain Mathews. He was that vilest and most despicable of all profligates, a married rake. No rebuff disconcerted him; the gratification of his vanity and the indulgence of his passions combined to render the ruin of Miss Linley the supreme object of his ambition.

* Almon's Memoirs, vol. iv., p. 97.

Unless she assented to his proposals, he basely threatened to spread abroad a false imputation upon her character which she could not disprove and which the world would readily believe. Her vanity had at first been flattered by his addresses; she felt tenderly towards him, but she was astounded when she learned how disgracefully he presumed upon her admiration. She confided the secret of her unhappiness to Sheridan, who had no difficulty in convincing her that flight alone would save her from further indignity and annoyance, and he offered to accompany and watch over her. Nothing was said or arranged about marriage; indeed, Miss Linley's only desire at the time she eloped with Sheridan, accompanied by a maid whom he had engaged to attend her, was to proceed to a place where she might be freed from the intolerable importunities of Captain Mathews.

The party halted at London on their way to the Continent. There, Sheridan introduced Miss Linley to Mr. Ewart, a respectable brandy merchant and a friend of his family, as a rich heiress, with whom he was eloping. In consequence of this, as Moore relates, "the old gentleman, with many commendations of his wisdom, for having given up the imprudent pursuit of Miss Linley, not only accommodated the fugitives with a passage on board a ship, which he had ready to sail from the port of London to Dunkirk, but gave them letters of recommendation to his correspondents at that place, who, with the same zeal and despatch, facilitated their journey to Lisle." Not long after reaching France, the same eloquence which had been used to persuade Miss Linley to leave Bath under his

charge, was employed to persuade her to become his wife, in order to silence the tongue of scandal. A marriage is said to have been celebrated by a priest near Calais; in any case, however, this was nothing but a formality, for the pair continued to live apart. Mr. Linley arrived and took away his daughter, in ignorance that any tie of a binding character united her to Sheridan, and gave a promise that, at a future time, he might possibly consent to their union.

Meanwhile, Captain Mathews had published a letter, in which he called Sheridan a liar and a scoundrel. In order to prove that he was what, in the opinion of the day, was styled a man of honour, Sheridan challenged his adversary, and they fought a duel. The result was unfavourable to Captain Mathews, inasmuch as, being disarmed, he had to beg for his life. A rumour gaining currency that the beaten party had shown the white feather, another duel had to be fought, in order, as Sir Lucius O'Trigger would have said, to remove misunderstandings. On the second occasion Sheridan was wounded; but, whether the duel had been fairly fought, or whether the conduct of both parties had been entirely satisfactory, was a topic which continued to be the subject of discussion among scandal-mongers, and of controversy in the newspapers. According to the versions of the respective combatants and their friends, each had performed prodigies of valour. It does not seem to have occurred to any of their contemporaries that Captain Mathews, in attempting to commit adultery and seduction, was a blackguard whom to outwit was a merit and to meet was degradation. However, the hero of the adventure, which might have become a tragedy,

had his reward in public notoriety. His conduct was generally approved, notwithstanding that many points, which he alone could elucidate, remained unintelligible. Had he been less indolent, the controversy would have been protracted. He did his best to injure his own cause. Reports reflecting injuriously on his honour and veracity were circulated in the country papers by his opponents. He requested Woodfall to reprint them in full in *The Public Advertiser*, as a preliminary to their being refuted in detail. They were reprinted, and the disparaging charges thus obtained additional publicity. But the refutation never appeared, because Sheridan omitted or forgot to write it.

Meanwhile his position was as delicate as it was painful. His union with Miss Linley was but a ceremony; her father had no knowledge of a marriage having occurred; she was fulfilling her engagements without her husband having any power to control her, nor could the pair find any opportunity for associating together. Many stratagems were required to exchange the most commonplace phrases. Moore asserts that Sheridan actually disguised himself as a hackney coachman, in order that he might drive Miss Linley home from the theatre and exchange words with her. During this period he suffered the pangs of anxiety which he has depicted in the character of Faulkland. Miss Linley was courted by every one but the man for whom she had the strongest liking, and who ardently reciprocated the feeling. Mr. Linley, wearied out at last by the persistency, ingenuity and entreaties of Sheridan, consented to their marriage, which was celebrated with all due solemnity and

regularity about a year after the alleged clandestine union at Calais.

With the exception of the £3000 which Mr. Long had settled on Miss Linley, the newly-wedded pair had no means whereon to live. Her voice had long yielded her father a handsome income, but from this source, with a delicacy that in these days would be considered foolish, Sheridan refused to draw a farthing.

How to procure the necessary funds for housekeeping was, with him, the subject of many projects. He contemplated writing essays after the manner of Addison, and letters like those of Chesterfield, and made some attempts in both lines, but without giving his productions to the world. His first venture as an author had not been of a nature to encourage him to repeat the experiment. Hence he was insensibly led to make another and entirely different attempt to gain popular applause and a pecuniary return. He wrote a play, offered it to the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, had the satisfaction of finding it accepted and of seeing it put on the stage, and had the mortification, as had Beaumarchais, the Sheridan of France, when *The Barber of Seville* was acted, of witnessing its failure.

He was twenty-four years old when, in 1775, his comedy, *The Rivals*, was represented for the first time. The success of the piece was doubtful from the beginning: at the fall of the curtain the dissatisfied audience could only be pacified by an assurance that the piece would not be played again till after it had been revised and amended. The author attributed his failure to personal enmity on the part of many who came prepared to disapprove. He supposed that his

duel with Captain Mathews and his marriage with Miss Linley had raised up for him opponents who were angry, envious, and longing to have their revenge. In point of fact, however, the play was imperfectly constructed and inadequately represented; it was far too diffuse in many places, while the important part of Sir Lucius O'Trigger was sadly bungled. Many excisions having been made, and a skilful actor having been substituted for an incompetent one in the part of Sir Lucius, the play was performed for the second time amidst loud manifestations of delight and approbation. Great as was the success in London, it was still more marked when performances took place soon afterwards at Southampton, Bristol, and Bath. By this one work he heightened the personal notoriety he had achieved by his love-adventure; he now enjoyed a dazzling vision of future fortune and a foretaste of fame.

The time at which Sheridan made his mark as a dramatist was propitious for the appearance of a new writer for the stage. Murphy, Cumberland, Garrick, and Colman were the best-known playwrights of the day; they were respectable mediocrities who knew all the tricks and technicalities of theatrical representation, who wrote good acting pieces, but whose names are better known than their works to the present generation. The sensation caused by the broad humorous farces of Foote was declining, and Foote himself was on the point of laying down the pen. The comedies of Congreve were still represented; but Evelina, who went to see *Love for Love*, blushed when she listened to the dialogue, and was ashamed to discuss the plot. The far grosser comedies of Vanbrugh and Wycherly were

tabooed by general consent. Only one contemporary writer displayed anything of the freshness and fancy which characterized the earliest dramatic venture of Sheridan. Six years before *The Rivals* had been brought out at Covent Garden, *The Good-natured Man* was represented there, and its success, though dubious at first, was afterwards undoubted. It was followed, five years afterwards, by *She Stoops to Conquer*, which met with a heartier welcome. If Oliver Goldsmith, his fellow countryman, had not been prematurely carried off but a short time before Sheridan was hailed as a new and original dramatist, the latter might have had as a competitor for contemporary favour and the approbation of posterity, one with whom successful rivalry would have been honourable and far from easy.

Sheridan's second attempt was made in the same year as the first, and was merely a piece written for the benefit of Mr. Clinch, who had contributed, by his excellent acting, to render *The Rivals* popular. Such a farce as *St. Patrick's Day, or the Scheming Lieutenant*, might have been written by any of the hack playwrights of the time, with the exception of the character of Doctor Rosy, which is in Sheridan's peculiar and artificial vein, and a few sentences like the following, with which it opens:—"1st Soldier: I say you are wrong; we should all speak together, each for himself, and all at once, that we may be heard the better. 2nd Soldier: Right, Jack, we'll argue in platoons. 3rd Soldier: Ay, ay, let him have our grievances in a volley." Again, when the soldiers are complaining to Lieutenant O'Connor about the innkeepers, O'Connor asks:—"Pray, which of the

houses use you ill? 1st Soldier: There's the Red Lion an't half the civility of the Old Red Lion. 2nd Soldier: There's the White Horse, if he wasn't case hardened, ought to be ashamed to show his face. O'Connor: Very well; the Horse and the Lion shall answer for it at the quarter sessions. Trounce: The Two Magpies are civil enough, but the Angel uses us like devils, and the Rising Sun refuses us light to go to bed by. O'Connor: Then, upon my word, I'll have the Rising Sun put down, and the Angel shall give security for his good behaviour."

Before the year 1775 ended, he made his third venture as a dramatist, but this time he essayed a different style of composition. Having succeeded in comedy, and farce he now produced a comic opera, *The Duenna.* With the exception of *The Beggar's Opera,* no piece of the kind has had a success so great, immediate, and lasting. It had a run of sixty-five nights on its appearance, and was represented thirty times during the succeeding season. One result of Sheridan's brilliant triumphs was that Covent Garden Theatre became a dangerous rival to Drury Lane. The veteran Garrick strove, but in vain, to attract audiences to the latter house. His failure confirmed him in his determination to retire alike from the stage and the management of a theatre. A terrible malady from which he suffered, rendered a life of toil as an actor, and worry as a manager, utterly insupportable. To find a successor in whom he could repose confidence, and who should be able to make the necessary payments, had for some time occupied his thoughts. Among the many extraordinary things in the annals of theatrical enterprise, most startling

is the circumstances of young Sheridan becoming Garrick's successor as manager, purchasing his interest in Drury Lane Theatre for thirty-five thousand pounds. Stranger still is the fact that the old, shrewd, and cautious Garrick readily accepted the offer of the inexperienced, sanguine, and youthful Sheridan. Where the latter procured the fifteen thousand pounds which he personally undertook to pay is a mystery his friends and biographers confess their inability to fathom. If the truth were disclosed, it would probably appear that for once in his life Garrick was reckless enough to become the creditor of the man who, to outward appearance, was his debtor.

Sheridan began his new career very badly. It was expected that he would produce another comedy, whereas he contented himself with expurgating Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, and representing it under the title of *A Trip to Scarborough*. Even this purified version of a gross piece was thought unfitted for public representation. Yet not many years ago the acting of Mrs. Jordan in the part of Miss Hayden made it a favourite with playgoers. However, neither the play nor the acting sufficed to attract large audiences in 1776, and Drury Lane Theatre seemed doomed to be a losing speculation to all concerned.

On the evening of May 8th, 1776, *The School for Scandal* was produced. Read by Garrick in manuscript, it powerfully impressed him. During his own management he had put on the stage, and acted the part of Sir Anthony Branville in, Mrs. Sheridan's *Discovery*, a comedy which had a very warm reception. He anticipated, however, for the play of her brilliant son a still greater success on the same

boards, nor was he disappointed. At the close of the performance he was in ecstacies, and his delight was but a reflex of the general satisfaction with which the appearance of the greatest comedy of the century was greeted. Everything combined to render the event almost unparalleled. The actors perfectly interpreted the author's ideas. Walpole relates that, to his great astonishment, there were more parts performed admirably in *The School for Scandal* than he almost ever saw in any play. "It seemed a marvellous resurrection of the stage." Charles Lamb accounted it some "compensation for growing old to have seen *The School for Scandal* in its glory. . . . . No piece was ever so completely cast in all its parts as this *Manager's* comedy."

Yet this play, which crowned the author's reputation, had a narrow escape from being suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain. Sheridan gave the following account of this in a speech delivered in the House of Commons on the 3rd of December 1795 :—"On the night before the first appearance of *The School for Scandal* he was informed that it could not be performed, as a licence was refused. It happened at this time there was the famous city contest for the office of Chamberlain between Wilkes and Hopkins. The latter had been charged with some practices similar to those of Moses, the Jew, in lending money to young men under age, and it was supposed that the character of the play was levelled at him, in order to injure him in his contest, in which he was supported by the ministerial interest. In the warmth of a contested election, the piece was represented as a factious and seditious opposition to a Court candidate. He, however, went

to Lord Hertford, then Lord Chamberlain, who laughed at the affair, and gave the licence." *

The impression made by this play was such that no after failure could utterly mar its author's fame, nor could any other success materially heighten it. It was the climax of his art. His next piece, *The Critic*, produced four years later, was a farce, and though not so original as others of his dramatic works, is quite as clever and likely to live. *The Critic* was but a new version of *The Rehearsal* which the Duke of Buckingham composed a century before to ridicule the rhyming tragedies of Dryden. Sheridan set himself to ridicule the bombast of the blank verse tragedies of his day. Up to the time *The Critic* was put on the stage, *The Rehearsal* was often played, the part of Bayes being a favourite with Garrick; but the new version soon displaced the older one. To get an audience to listen to *The Rehearsal* now, would be as difficult as to get an audience that could understand the allusions in it; yet *The Critic* is as fresh and welcome after the lapse of a century as it was on the first evening of its performance.

In 1779, his last piece of any note or value was produced. Four plays of remarkable excellence had been composed by him within the same number of years. Although only twenty-eight, yet his ambition in one department of exertion was satisfied: he now aspired to distinguish himself in another way, and before a more fastidious and potent audience.

At this period he lived sumptuously. One who was present at his entertainments has remarked that "although his guests denounced his extravagance,

* Sheridan's Speeches, vol. iii., p. 17.

they never refused his invitations."* At these parties his wife displayed her inimitable vocal talents, and those who could no longer hear her sing in public were glad of the opportunity to listen to her in private. To his public reputation, he thus added a social one which contributed to enhance the esteem of the dinner-giving class. It was generally allowed that a clever couple who gave so many pleasant parties merited the countenance of society, the patronage of the great, and approbation for exerting themselves and lavishing money in order that their richer or aristocratic fellow-creatures might be amused and gratified. Miss Fanny Burney, describing an entertainment at Mrs. Cholmondeley's, where she met Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan, in 1779, says of the latter, "I was absolutely charmed at the sight of her. I think her quite as beautiful as ever, and even more captivating; for she has now a look of ease and happiness that animates her whole face." Confirming a remark of Wilkes, already quoted, Miss Burney observes that her sister, Miss Linley, "appeared heavy and inanimate." She adds: "Mr. Sheridan has a very fine figure, and a good, though I don't think a handsome face. He is tall and very upright, and his appearance and address are at once manly and fashionable; without the smallest tincture of foppery or modish graces. In short I like him vastly, and think him every way worthy his beautiful companion. . . . They are extremely happy in each other: he evidently adores her, and she as evidently idolises him. The world has by no means done him justice."†

A personal acquaintance having been formed between

* The Rev. A. G. L'Estrange's Literary Life of the Rev. W. Harness, p. 151.

† Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay, vol. i., pp. 182-185.

Charles James Fox and Sheridan, the desire of the latter to enter Parliament was increased by the approval of the former. At the general election of 1780, Sheridan made an appeal for the suffrages of the free and independent electors of Stafford, and his eloquence, enforced by his purse, proved so effective that he was chosen to represent them.

His entrance into the House of Commons was contemporaneous with that of William Pitt. The contrast between the two was notable; the son of a poor player, the writer of plays, and the manager of a play-house, seemed an intruder into what was then the most exclusive, exacting, and aristocratic representative assembly ever known, whereas the son of the Earl of Chatham appeared to have entered his natural and proper sphere. It was not long before the inequality of birth and station was redressed by the exhibition of extraordinary talents, and the haughtiest man of his age was compelled to treat with respect the playwright whom he tried to extinguish with a sneer, and from whom he received a retort as well-timed and crushing as that which his father had administered to Sir Robert Walpole.

Sheridan's first Parliamentary appearance was not promising; he had to defend himself against a charge of bribery, and he defended himself feebly. Instead of speaking sense, he moralized like Joseph Surface. Rigby, a veteran office-holder, an adept in the arts of corruption, an unblushing upholder of every iniquitous measure by which he might retain place and salary, thought that he would teach the new member such a lesson as should hinder him from again opening his mouth in Parliament. Fox, always ready to aid a

friend and always generous towards young and inexperienced members, came to the rescue, took Sheridan's part, and turned the laugh upon his opponents. Sheridan did not despair of succeeding as a speaker: he believed that he had the power, if he could but use it properly and find a propitious occasion. Nor did he forget the attack of Rigby. It was not long before he gained the ear of the House, and became a favourite with his audience; then he returned with interest the comments of his earliest foe. Speaking, on the 8th of March, 1782, in support of Lord John Cavendish's motion of censure on Ministers, he intimated that: "He must speak to the purpose, but he wished not to be judged by the test laid down by the right honourable gentleman [Mr. Rigby], for he meant to give no offence in what he should say: though it was true the rule had been proposed from high authority; for undoubtedly, if the degree of offence which speeches gave was to be considered as the criterion of eloquence, the right honourable gentleman must be looked up to as the Demosthenes of that assembly."*

A conclusive proof of the rapidity with which he advanced in the opinion of the House and his party is the fact that on the second Rockingham Administration being formed in 1782, it was thought fitting that he should be appointed one of the Under Secretaries of State. There are few instances, if indeed there be any in the last century, of a young man without high-born patrons or connections, and dependent solely upon his own abilities for his elevation, becoming a Secretary of the Treasury two years after his entrance into the House of Commons.

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 36.

That he was incompetent to fill the post to which he had been appointed is commonly asserted. It may be true that he was no better qualified for his duties, and that he discharged them as perfunctorily as any young and inexperienced peer or peer's son, whose birth is his only test of merit. Dull plodders would naturally think that such a man could never prove an efficient public servant. The wits of that day might as naturally think it a good joke to give office to one of their number. Certain it is that the general feeling of the period was represented in the following notice, said to have been affixed to the door of Sheridan's room at the Treasury :—"No applications can be received here on Sundays, nor any business done during the remainder of the week."

When, three months after its formation, the Rockingham Administration was dissolved by the death of its head, Sheridan concurred with Fox, Burke, and Lord John Cavendish in the propriety of resigning rather than serve under the Earl of Shelburne. Shortly afterwards, he returned to office upon the formation of the unfortunate Coalition Ministry. He did his best to dissuade Fox from embarking in an enterprise fraught with peril, and incapable of defence on any other ground than that of expediency. He justly said, after the Ministry had been dismissed from office :—"The prejudices of the public all concurred to prevent this Coalition. The middling classes of the people, for whom he had the highest respect, and to whom the House of Commons must look for support in every emergency, sooner than to the great, were not certainly the best qualified to judge of nice and refined points of politics. Accustomed to judge of measures

by men, he apprehended that they would give themselves no time to examine the principles, motives, and grounds of a Coalition; but condemn it on its first appearance, merely because it was composed of men who had long been political enemies. On these grounds, full of apprehension for the character of his right honourable friend [Fox], he most certainly gave him his advice against a Coalition." * This advice was far sounder than the view in favour of the measure itself to which he afterwards became a convert. More fortunate than many who had followed the lead of Fox, and had sat on the same bench with Lord North, Sheridan was again returned by his former constituents at the general election of 1784.

Wraxall, a member of the same Parliament, a political opponent, and specially incensed against any one who had taken an active part in the measures of the Coalition Ministry, draws the following picture of Sheridan at this period:—"He possessed a ductility and versatility of talents which no public man in our time has equalled; and these intellectual endowments were sustained by a suavity of temper that seemed to set at defiance all attempts to ruffle or discompose it. Playing with his irritable or angry antagonist, Sheridan exposed him by sallies of wit, or attacked him with classic elegance of satire; performing this arduous task in the face of a crowded assembly, without losing for an instant either his presence of mind, his facility of expression, or his good humour. He wounded deepest, indeed, when he smiled, and convulsed his hearers with laughter, while the object of his ridicule or animadversion was twisting under the lash. . . . At

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 67.

this period of his life, when he was not more than thirty-three years of age, his countenance and features had in them something peculiarly pleasing ; indicative at once of intellect, humour, and gaiety. All these characteristics played about his lips when speaking, and operated with inconceivable attraction ; for they anticipated, as it were, to the eye the effect produced by his oratory on the ear ; thus opening for him a sure way to the heart or the understanding. "Even the tones of his voice, which were singularly mellifluous, aided the general effect of his eloquence." *

While Sheridan's attainment of an official position was unusually rapid, his enjoyment of office was very brief; his subsequent occupation of a seat on the Opposition benches lasted for twenty-two years. During that long period he was a frequent speaker, and an unremitting critic of the measures of William Pitt. To financial questions, he specially devoted himself. Moore, who has done scant justice to Sheridan's Parliamentary career, flippantly detracts from his financial capacity by stating that, after having given a fortnight to the study of the Multiplication Table, he considered himself qualified to become Chancellor of the Exchequer. That a man who displayed so much carelessness and incompetence in managing his private affairs should have aspired or essayed to supervise and regulate the finances of the nation appears superlatively absurd ; yet the test is wholly fallacious, as the conduct of Pitt himself clearly demonstrated. Sheridan thought it no presumption to act as guar-

* Posthumous Memoirs of his Own Times, by Sir N. W. Wraxall, Bart., vol. i., p. 36.

dian of the public purse. He once openly avowed that to do so had been his custom, and none of his contemporaries ridiculed the avowal. After Pitt had concluded his Budget speech in 1793, Sheridan said:—"The right honourable gentleman had, however, called on the House to watch the whole of the business with vigilance, and even with jealousy. The call was not necessary to him, for he had uniformly acted on that principle upon all revenue questions, and, without apologising for an essential act of duty, he would always continue to do so." * He did this so profoundly, on some occasions, as to baffle the reporters. Instead of a report of a speech, such an apology as the following was given:—"Mr. Sheridan entered into a long train of arguments founded upon figures, through which it was impossible to follow him in detail from memory." He repeatedly protested against the usage of those days, in accordance with which tax-bills were not printed and distributed among the members, but presented to the House in manuscript. This is one of these sensible protests:—"Revenue regulations and tax-bills they appeared to consider as things which they were to vote on confidence in the minister; notwithstanding the multitude of provisions which they generally contained, by almost every one of which the liberty of the subject was more or less affected. In consequence of this confidential carelessness, he had never been able to get a tax-bill printed, though he had often attempted it—an attempt in which he was persuaded he must at last succeed; for it was not to be believed that the House would persevere in passing bills, containing a great variety of important compli-

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 180.

cated clauses, without taking the ordinary means to comprehend and understand them."* Owing to this practice, the Bills were very loosely worded. Examples of this were supplied by the Horse, Stamp, and Window Acts, concerning which he said :—"That the wording of some conveyed the idea of the horses not only inhabiting the houses, but the extraordinary circumstance of their looking out of the windows." †

Not confining himself to mere comments on schemes of finance, he laid down principles of taxation which show that he had learned something more than could be acquired from unremitting study of the Multiplication Table. Opposing the repeal of the Receipt Tax, on the 4th of December, 1783, he said that "in his mind the great recommendation of the Receipt Tax was that being paid directly, and not indirectly, the public felt it, and it naturally led them to consider the state of the nation. This was the excellence of the tax, and a right principle of taxation. If he might presume to lay down a principle of taxation, as fit to be adopted in an arbitrary and in a free country, taxes should be imposed as indirectly as possible in the former, and the giving alarm to men's feelings ought to be most studiously avoided. The reverse exactly should be the case in a free country; the taxes there ought always to be direct and open. The subject, when he paid any of them should know that he paid a tax, and his attention should in consequence be provoked to an examination of the country's debts, the weight of which, being obliged to be borne by all, they necessarily concerned all in an equal degree." ‡

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 68. † Speeches, vol. i., p. 209.
‡ Speeches, vol. i., p. 58.

On all the important subjects discussed in Parliament during the latter portion of the Eighteenth and earlier portion of the Nineteenth century, he took a side which was nearly invariably that of progress, and gave to it an advocacy always brilliant and generally most effective. He spoke and voted for Parliamentary Reform in England; he was chosen by the representatives of the Scottish Royal Burghs to support their proposition for reform, and he discharged this duty with zeal and energy. When the senseless panic as to the spread of French principles in this country led to the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act and the enactment of measures for the restriction of personal freedom, Sheridan's voice was raised in ridicule of the panic, and in denunciation of the retrograde projects. At a time when men who passed as Liberals were bemoaning the licence of the Press, and were upholding schemes subversive of independent discussion, he opposed these schemes, avowing his opinion, "that the Press should be unfettered; that its freedom should be, as indeed it was, commensurate with the freedom of the people and the well-being of a virtuous State; on that account he thought that even a hundred libels had better be ushered into the world than one prosecution be instituted which might endanger the liberty of the Press of this country." * At a later period, he again embodied his sentiments on this subject in a few words which produced as strong an effect upon the House as any of his most carefully prepared passages:—"Give them a corrupt House of Lords, give them a venal House of Commons, give them a tyrannical Prince, give them a

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 238.

truckling Court, and let me have but an unfettered Press, I will defy them to encroach a hair's-breadth upon the liberties of England." On the subject of the slave trade he is reported by Moore, his biographer, to have made no speech. Certainly there is no record of a great speech on that subject having been delivered by him. But that he showed any hesitation or reluctance in associating himself with one of the best measures for the well-being of humanity brought forward and passed in his day, is very far from being true. Indeed, he was actually in advance of many who spoke or voted for the abolition of that infamous traffic. In the year that the Bill became law, when many of the upholders of the slave-trade resorted to the argument, only too effective in the House of Commons, and commonly the last despairing move of the partisans of a lost cause—that the measure would not be accepted as final, and that opponents of the slave-trade would not rest till they had abolished slavery, Sheridan acknowledged himself to be as earnestly in favour of the one measure as of the other. He said, "An honourable baronet had talked of a cloven foot; he pleaded guilty to the cloven foot; but of a man who expressed pleasure at the hope of seeing so large a portion of the human race freed from the shackles of tyranny, it should rather be said that he displayed the pennon of an angel than the cloven foot of a demon. It was true no immediate connection existed between the abolition of the slave-trade and the abolition of slavery, but the same feeling must be aroused by the consideration of both questions; and he who detested the one practice must also detest the other. He did not like to hear the term 'property' applied to the

subjects of a free country. Could man become the property of man ?" *

Though Sheridan soon took high rank among the good speakers and admirable debaters in the House of Commons, yet he was not classed among the greatest of English orators till after he had made his memorable speeches against Warren Hastings. The opportunity he then had for the display of his powers was almost unique. An impeachment of equal note had not been made since the time when the favourite minister of Charles the First was proceeded against for high crimes and misdemeanours, found guilty and executed. Warren Hastings was one of the favourites of George the Third. In the opinion of his sovereign and his friends, he was the saviour of India; according to others, chief among whom was Edmund Burke, he was the greatest malefactor of the age. By one section of the community he was adored for having completed with unexampled brilliancy the great work begun by Lord Clive; another, and much smaller section, regarded him as one who merited the punishment ordinarily reserved for buccaneers and pirates.

It is indisputable that Warren Hastings had been instrumental in extending the rule of this country over the East, and that to his vigour as a conqueror and an administrator the people of England owed the satisfaction of considering the acquisitions made in India ample compensation for the losses sustained in America. Moreover, his victories added largely to the national wealth. The rich spoils of the vanquished were distributed throughout England. That hundreds of families were the richer was due to him; the nation

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 511.

at large hailed him as a benefactor. To have annexed vast territories without adding to the National Debt, to have rendered war the most lucrative of undertakings, to have distributed large dividends to the holders of East India Stock while gaining glory for the English nation, seemed to most men feats as novel as they were gratifying, and deserving not only unstinted applause but a princely recompense. Nor was the monarch on the throne, any more than the shouting mob in the street, too curious as to the precise moral character of the actions performed by Hastings. They were so entirely satisfied with the result as to be utterly indifferent to the means by which it had been attained.

A few men, among whom Edmund Burke was the most earnest and the most conspicuous, thought otherwise. Not all the victories won by Clive, or all the acquisitions made by Hastings, dazzled him so as to blind his eyes to the treatment of those whom the conquerors had oppressed and ruined. He boldly stigmatized as freebooters and tyrants the men whom others regarded as heroes. He made it the business of his life to bring Warren Hastings to trial, in order that the real nature of his proceedings might be set forth, and that an appropriate penalty might be inflicted. He inspired men of both parties in the House of Commons with the feelings by which he himself was animated. Pitt, in an impressive speech, declared that Warren Hastings merited impeachment. The aid and oratory of Fox had been given from the first in support of the same view. Inferior men followed the leaders of their party in declaring for this great inquest of the nation.

Next to Burke came Sheridan as an uncompromising supporter of the impeachment. He perceived that the occasion was an excellent one for the display of his special talents, and he laboured with unwonted diligence to play his part with splendour. Never were the toilsome preparations of the study better repaid by personal success in Parliament. William Pitt, his constant and uncomplimentary opponent, Burke, his countryman and rival, Fox, his acknowledged chief, all concurred in pronouncing his speech advocating the impeachment of Warren Hastings to be the most marvellous piece of oratory they had ever heard in the House of Commons. More gratifying to his vanity, and still more unexpected, were the compliments paid him by the less notable members who had come prepared to vote against him, but who professed themselves ready to give him their support. The friends and defenders of Warren Hastings pleaded that they were unprepared at the moment with a suitable reply, and complained that, feeling themselves under a spell, they were powerless to refute accusations which, till stated by Sheridan, appeared to them alike baseless and unjust. It was unanimously resolved to adjourn the debate in order that a division might be taken when the House was in a calmer and more impartial mood.

After the trial had begun, Sheridan addressed the House of Lords, as one of the managers of the impeachment, on the same charge which had been the subject of his great speech in the House of Commons. The unprecedented success he had achieved on the first occasion made the second an ordeal of an unusually trying kind. To acquit himself as well a second time was to fall short of the expectations that had been

raised. So greatly was the public curiosity excited that fifty guineas were offered for a seat in Westminster Hall.* He followed Burke, whose opening speech, wherein, in the name of the people of India, the Commons of England, and of human nature itself, he solemnly impeached Warren Hastings of high crimes and misdemeanors, was one of the most finished and impassioned ever delivered by that wonderful master of language, and ever heard by an English audience. Yet Sheridan successfully bore the double test of comparison with himself and with Burke, and for three successive days electrified his hearers. Without a tithe of Burke's profundity, and with no portion of his genius, he was better able to influence an audience and excite their admiration, for, in addition to being an impressive orator, he was also a consummate actor. A contemporary who heard this speech, and who was a declared opponent of the speaker, records that "the most ardent admirers of Burke, of Fox, and of Pitt, allowed that they had been outdone as orators by Sheridan." †

Burke himself was ready to bow to this decision. On the evening of the third and concluding day of the speech, a motion was made in the House of Commons to inquire into the legal expenditure incurred by the prosecution, whereupon, with something of the old Roman spirit, Burke aptly adopted the old Roman style, saying, "Instead of resolving ourselves into a committee on miserable accounts, let us, like the Romans after Scipio's victories, go and thank the Gods for this day's triumph in Westminster Hall. As to my-

* Walpole's Letters, vol. ix., p. 127.
† Wraxall's Posthumous Memoirs of His Own Time, vol. iii., p. 104.

self, I have been too highly strained, and my mind is not sufficiently relaxed, after the sublime repast of which I have just partaken, to sink my thoughts to the level of such an inquiry."*

Sheridan made himself quite as conspicuous, but far less popular and useful, by speeches of another sort. He was the semi-official representative in the House of Commons of the spendthrift and profligate Prince of Wales. He foolishly put his confidence in that Prince, who, in return, treated him as a favourite servant when it suited his purpose, and with indifference when he had no dirty work for him to perform. When the friends of his Royal Highness refused to be his instruments in excusing a piece of treachery or in brazening out a falsehood, he declared "then Sheridan *must*." It was the general opinion that Sheridan exercised paramount influence over the Prince, and he was frequently charged with using his power to further his ambition. Frequently, he was forced to notice and answer these allegations; on one occasion, the 8th of June, 1795, he emphatically said that "he never was a secret counsellor to the Prince of Wales. He never gave him any advice in which he did not wish it were possible for the King to stand on one side and the people of England on the other. . . . In answer to dark insinuations, he had only to say that he had never, during the long period that he had enjoyed the confidence of his Royal Highness, accepted the slightest favour of his Royal Highness." †

Though it be true that, with the exception of the

* Wraxall's Posthumous Memoirs, vol. iii., p. 105.
† Speeches, vol. ii., p. 504.

not very important post of Receiver of the Duchy of Cornwall, which he received late in life, Sheridan was unburdened with substantial marks of princely favour and gratitude, yet it is equally true that he laboured in the expectation of his services being adequately requited, and that he was disappointed as all those are who base their hopes of advancement on the quicksand of a Prince's friendship. He was one of the most ardent upholders of the right of the Prince to assume the office of Regent, when, in 1788, the King temporarily lost his reason. The unlooked-for recovery of the King dissipated the expectations which the Whigs had formed of immediate accession to power, and doomed them to continue an Opposition which had become more hopeless owing to their injudicious conduct in the debates on the Regency. In 1793, the Whig party was broken up. The chiefs differed among themselves concerning the momentous issues raised by the French revolution. Burke sided with Pitt, and preached a crusade against the destroyers of the French monarchy. Fox, Sheridan, and Grey stood forth as the champions of liberty in France and of peace with all mankind. The victorious career of Buonaparte had the effect of inclining Sheridan to the views enunciated by Burke, and of indisposing him to the pacific policy of Fox, and he gained credit for superior patriotism by violent exhortations in favour of war.

The latter part of his life was characterized by isolation in the House of Commons, severe private affliction, and pecuniary ruin. In 1792, he lost the wife whom he had won with such difficulty, whose beauty, though unsurpassed by that of any contemporary, was

not her greatest distinction, and of whom a distinguished prelate said, that "she seemed to him the connecting link between woman and angel." His friends and biographers represent him as inconsolable. One of them says, the four years succeeding the sad event were "wasted in the vain efforts of dissipating his mourning for the greatest domestic affliction—the loss of a wife and child tenderly if not immoderately loved."* This remark is introductory to the announcement that he married again after being four years a widower. His second wife was a young lady the same age as his son. She had a small fortune, and was the daughter of Dr. Ogle, Dean of Winchester, whom Madame d'Arblay describes as being "a man of facetious pleasantry, yet of real sagacity, though mingled with eccentricities, perversities, and decidedly republican principles."† It was thought more wonderful that she should have married him than that he should have grown tired of his lonely state. He had become addicted to seeking brilliancy from the bottle. Dissipation flamed in his face. He seemed better fitted to be a boon companion than a husband, yet his second wife was as devotedly attached to him as the first.

Prior to this marriage, he had succeeded in raising the funds necessary to re-build Drury-Lane Theatre, after its destruction by fire. As is customary, the outlay exceeded the estimate, and thus he was burdened with liabilities which he was unprepared to discharge and had not intended to incur. The new building was opened on the 21st of April, 1794. *Macbeth* was performed, the leading parts being filled by John

* Sheridan and His Times, vol. ii., p. 233.
† Life of Dr. Burney, by Madame d'Arblay, vol. i., p. 338.

Kemble and Mrs. Siddons. It is believed "that on this night Edmund Kean, the great tragedian, then a mere boy of some eight years, made his first appearance on the boards as one of the blue-devils in the witches' scene." Miss Farren delivered an address. What pleased the audience quite as much as the performance, was the exhibition of the elaborate devices for securing the new theatre against destruction by fire. A massive iron curtain was lowered and "struck with heavy hammers, in order to prove that it was something more than stage iron, which, by its clang, reverberated through the house, mingling with the uproarious clamour of a delighted audience. On its being raised, another burst of applause rang from every quarter on the exhibition of a cascade of water rushing down from tanks with which the roof had been supplied, roaring into a huge basin prepared for its reception; dashing, splashing, tumbling over artificial rocks, but bearing no doubt of its own reality, and clearly showing that in such an awful event as that of fire, they could not only extinguish the flame upon the instant, from whatever quarter it could originate, but actually drown the theatre." The writer of the foregoing passage, who appears to have been a friend of Sheridan, doubtless witnessed the spectacle which he describes with so much enthusiasm and apparent satisfaction. Sixteen years after this exhibition had been made, the House of Commons was illuminated with the glare of a great fire. The rumour spread that Drury Lane Theatre was burning. Out of compliment to Sheridan, who was present, it was proposed that the House should adjourn. With tact and good sense he declared that public business ought not to be interrupted by private

misfortune, and declined to support the proposal. He left the House and witnessed the total destruction by fire of the edifice containing a massive iron curtain to prevent flames from spreading, and cascades powerful enough to "drown the theatre."

This ill-fated house was the scene of another exhibition soon after that of the iron curtain and cascades, and of a fiasco which proved as damaging to the reputation of several eminent men as the subsequent fire did to the building. Mr. W. H. Ireland professed to have discovered in an old trunk a tragedy by Shakespeare, called *Vortigern*. Some of the best critics of the day, among whom the erudite Dr. Parr was the chief, read the manuscript and gave an unhesitating opinion in favour of the authenticity of the tragedy. Either trusting to their judgment or being deceived also, Sheridan purchased the spurious play for three hundred pounds in cash and a moiety of the profits during the first sixty nights of its performance. When the piece was performed the house was crowded from floor to ceiling with an audience wrought up to a high pitch of excitement. Before the third act was over the excitement was intensified, every one present vying with his neighbour in hissing a production which might have been taken out of an old trunk, but which had never proceeded from Shakespeare's pen. No one was greatly surprised to learn soon afterwards that the real author was Mr. Ireland, and that the great critics had been duped.

This mistake and the pecuniary loss it entailed, were in some measure counterbalanced by the success of a tragedy adapted and translated from Kotzebue's *Spaniards in Peru*, and re-named *Pizarro*. Among

the additions made were some passages in the highest Cambyses' vein, which, however, suited the taste of the time, and were regarded as superlatively eloquent. Even greater rant might have been rendered endurable when uttered by such tongues as those of Charles Kemble and Mrs. Siddons. The spectacular effects were in the loftiest style of stage magnificence; hence a piece intrinsically worthless became exceedingly popular, and helped to replenish the empty coffers of the theatre. The printed version was as successful with the reading public as the acted piece was with playgoers. No less than 29,000 copies were sold in a comparatively short space of time. An anecdote relating to it told by Pitt to Dr. Burney, when dining with him at Walmer Castle, deserves to be repeated. Mrs. Lloyd, a lady, or nominal housekeeper at Kensington Palace, "being in company with Mr. Sheridan without recollecting him, while *Pizarro* was the topic of discussion, she said to him, 'And so this fine *Pizarro* is printed?' 'Yes, so I hear,' said Sherry. 'And did you ever in your life read such stuff?' cried she. 'Why! I believe it's bad enough,' quoth Sherry, 'but at least, madam, you must allow it's very loyal.' 'Ah,' cried she, shaking her head, 'loyal? You don't know its author so well as I do.'"*

When, however, Drury Lane Theatre was burned down for the second time, the position of Sheridan became critical. He had always lived extravagantly; he had latterly shown himself more and more prone to intemperance. He was made Treasurer of the Navy and a member of the Privy Council upon the

* Memoirs of Dr. Burney, by Madame d'Arblay, vol. iii., p. 279.

return of the Whigs to power in 1806. After the death of Fox, he aspired to lead the party in the House of Commons, but neither his faithful service nor his long Parliamentary experience was accepted as a sufficient warrant for elevation to the leadership. Resigning his seat for Stafford, he became a candidate to succeed Fox as member for Westminster. He was elected, but was unsuccessful when he offered himself for re-election at the dissolution of Parliament. Nor could he persuade his old constituents at Stafford to return him again. All his projects now miscarried. He was charged with intriguing against the leaders of his party when the Prince of Wales became Regent in 1811, and with contributing, by his conduct on this occasion, to give the Tories the lease of power, which they retained till 1830. That he acted indiscreetly is certain. The information he is said to have withheld from Lords Grenville and Grey ought to have been communicated to them, as it might have induced them to undertake the Government. It is the opinion of Moore that "of all the various talents with which he was gifted, his dexterity in political intrigue and management was that of which he appears to have been most vain."* On this occasion, as at other times in his career, he may have been the victim of his own finesse, and may have wrought mischief inadvertently.

The new proprietors of Drury Lane Theatre refused to let him take an active part in managing its affairs. He fancied that he possessed ample means, while in reality he was insolvent. No longer enjoying exemption from arrest as a Member of Parliament, he was cast into prison by his creditors, and, though released after

* Moore's Life of Sheridan, vol. ii., p. 55.

a brief detention, he yet regarded himself as a dishonoured man. Struck down by sickness, against which his frame enfeebled by excesses could not bear up, he died at the age of sixty-five.

He died neglected, and he was buried with ostentation. A tomb in Westminster Abbey was declared to be his due. The pageantry, which a few years previously had been displayed when the mortal remains of Pitt and of Fox were carried to the same last resting-place, was reproduced at Sheridan's funeral. The chief officers of state, princes of the blood royal, dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, a prelate of the Church, did him the service of forming a procession in his honour after death. They pompously "helped to bury whom they helped to starve."

II.

CHARACTERISTICS AS A WRITER.

SHERIDAN wrote and spoke, as he lived, with a persistent view to effect. His whole life abounded in surprises; all his writings and speeches are filled with unexpected points. He was perpetually occupied in preparing literary fireworks and letting them off. To be thought the sayer and writer of good things was with him an object of ambition second only to that of getting credit for uttering or writing the ordinary products of his mind. He wished the world to think that epigrams were as natural to him as commonplaces are to other men. During his lifetime, his success in these respects was complete. But, since his biographer has disclosed the mechanism of his art, the world, while still retaining admiration for his ability, has ceased to regard him as a wonder. A conjuror's tricks are none the less clever after we have been shown how they are done; but they cease to startle when they are no longer mysterious and incomprehensible.

If genius be unconscious and imponderable power manifesting itself in unusual forms and at unlooked-for times, and if talent be conscious power developing and disciplining itself in regular order and after set rules, carefully adapting means to ends, and never producing a wholly novel and unexpected result, then

Sheridan must be classed among the men of no genius but of great talent. He had the capacity for compassing his designs, and the sense to know the exact measure of his abilities. In his cleverness he resembles Dryden; whatever Dryden wrote Sheridan might have written, excepting "Alexander's Feast" and the "Ode to St. Cecilia."

The points of resemblance between Dryden and Sheridan are numerous and distinct. Both were ardent politicians as well as playwrights; both aspired to be wits, and both attained their object. Each made a study of style, and each produced a style which possesses a notable individuality. Even now there is no better example of easy, idiomatic and forcible writing than the prose of Dryden, while that of Sheridan is an admirable example of the best-chosen words arranged in the most effective order. Both were prone to the same failing, that of lapsing into bombast when they aimed at sublimity; neither seems to be more at home, nor to write more naturally, than when penning the rant of Almanzor or the rant of Rolla. In the case of Sheridan, far more than that of Dryden, culture of form and minuteness of finish are carried to ridiculous excess. Like the pictures of pre-Raphaelite artists, his scenes are all foreground. His mistresses and maids not only go mad in corresponding apparel, but in identical phrase. The valet is as witty as his master, and casts his witticisms in the same mould.

Sheridan's plays are uniform in style. The characteristics of his first comedy are those of the last. The grouping of the personages, and the management of the incidents, render them good acting plays; the

naturalness of the action more than compensating for the artificiality of the several characters. Taken separately, every personage is as finished and untrue to nature as the figures in a Chinese picture. In *The Rivals*, for instance, Thomas, a country coachman, and Fag, the servant to Captain Absolute, converse in a strain which may have suited the taste of the day, but which was utterly unnatural. Replying to an inquiry from the former, the latter says: "Why, then, the cause of all this is love—love, Thomas, who (as you may have got read to you) has been a masquerader since the days of Jupiter." When not indulging in classical allusions, Fag adopts this playful style of exaggeration in describing the fortune of Miss Lydia Languish: "Rich!—why, I believe she owns half the stocks! Zounds! Thomas, she could pay the National Debt as easily as I could my washerwoman! She has a lap-dog that eats out of gold; she feeds her parrot with small pearls; and all her thread-papers are made of bank-notes." To his master, Fag uses the same style. Captain Absolute having said, "You blockhead, never say more than is necessary," the reply is, "I beg pardon, Sir—I beg pardon—but, with submission, a lie is nothing unless one supports it. Sir, whenever I draw on my invention for a good current lie, I always forge endorsements as well as the bill." Not to be outdone, his master replies in the same strain: "Well, take care you don't hurt your credit by offering too much security." On another occasion, Fag is made to exhibit what his master calls impertinence, but which the author probably considered smartness. Sir Anthony Absolute having quarrelled with his son, Fag

tells the latter :—"Upon my credit, Sir, were I in your place, and found my father such very bad company, I should certainly drop his acquaintance."

Sir Anthony Absolute, who is represented as a hot-tempered country squire, speaks as smartly as a town wit. In answer to Mrs. Malaprop's remark, that circulating libraries are vile places, he says : "Madam, a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year! And depend on it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last." Again, his son telling him that he loves a lady, and that his vows are pledged to her, he retorts, "Let her foreclose, Jack; let her foreclose; they are not worth redeeming; besides, you have the angel's vows in exchange, I suppose; so there will be no loss there." Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the fortune-hunter and fire-eater, is as elaborately witty as the rest. Commenting on Mrs. Malaprop's ridiculous letter, he observes : "Faith, she must be very deep-read to write this way—though she is rather an arbitrary writer, too—for here are a great many poor words pressed into the service of this note that would get their *habeas corpus* from any court in Christendom."

Bob Acres, who is introduced as a not over-bright country dandy, winds up his first speech with a point worthy of George Selwyn :—"Ha! my dear friend, noble captain, and honest Jack, how dost? Just arrived, faith, as you perceive. Warm work on the roads, Jack!—Odds whips and wheels! I've travelled like a comet, with a tail of dust all the way as long as the Mall." His other sayings are equally out of character. "Your words are a grenadier's march to

my heart." "The thunder of your words has soured the milk of human kindness in my breast." David, his servant, is depicted as a clown, yet he speaks with the affectation of a fop. Acres having said, "But my honour, David, my honour! I must be very careful of my honour;" David replies, "Ah, by the mass! And I would be very careful of it; and I think, in return, my honour couldn't do less than to be very careful of me." Acres: "Think what it would be to disgrace my ancestors!" David: "Under favour, the surest way of not disgracing them is to keep as long as you can out of their company. Look'ee now, master, to go to them in such haste,—with an ounce of lead in your brains, I should think might as well be let alone. Our ancestors are very good kind of folks, but they are the last people I should choose to have a visiting acquaintance with."

The female personages are as artificial as the male; yet two of them—Mrs. Malaprop and Miss Lydia Languish—were intended to appear ridiculous, and to raise a laugh by their eccentricities. They certainly speak and act in character; the foolish phrases of Mrs. Malaprop, and the foolish sentiments of Miss Lydia Languish, being thoroughly suited to their respective parts. Very different is the sentimentality of Julia. It has a mawkish flavour which is sickening. She is well matched with the jealous, exacting, and unpractical Faulkland. Both converse in metaphor run to seed. Julia, offering to be Faulkland's companion in his flight, winds up thus: "Then on the bosom of your wedded Julia you may lull your keen regret to slumbering; while virtuous love, with a cherub's hand, shall smooth the brow of upbraiding thought, and

pluck the thorn from compunction." Faulkland replies that he is bankrupt in gratitude; but, in reality, he is not then prepared to cope with Julia in metaphor. At the end of the scene, and after she has left him, he strives to show the audience that he, too, can use fine language. "O love! tormentor! fiend!—whose influence, like the moon's, acting on men of dull souls, makes idiots of them, but meeting subtler spirits, betrays their course, and urges sensibility to madness." In the last scene, he thinks to make amends for his exacting conduct, and to regain Julia's affections by a metaphor: "How can I sue for what I so little deserve? I dare not presume—yet Hope is the child of Penitence." Of course he succeeds, and Julia, having heard Miss Lydia Languish say, "Our happiness is now as unalloyed as general," comes forward and ends the comedy with some parting metaphors:—"Then let us study to preserve it so; and while Hope pictures to us a flattering scene of future bliss, let us deny its pencil those colours which are too bright to be lasting. When hearts deserving happiness would unite their fortunes, Virtue would crown them with an unfading garland of modest hurtless flowers; but ill-judging Passion will force the gaudier rose into the wreath, whose thorn offends them when its leaves are dropped."

What is most remarkable about this comedy is the degree in which its demerits of diction and character are counterbalanced by its excellences as an acting play. Considered individually, the personages are inartistic; regarded as parts of a whole, they produce a pleasing impression. The forced wit and the forced sentiment of some of them do not materially

detract from the pleasure afforded by the clever buffoonery of Bob Acres, the farcical exaggeration of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the genuine humour of Sir Anthony Absolute, the elaborate blunders of Mrs. Malaprop, the amusing follies of Miss Lydia Languish.

In *The Duenna*, the misplaced wit and far-fetched sayings are less numerous. Yet Don Jerome, the irascible father, makes a speech such as no sane parent ever addressed to his son and daughter since the world began. Referring to a serenade he had interrupted, he tells his son in his daughter's presence, "What, I suppose you have been serenading too! Eh, disturbing some peaceable neighbourhood with villanous catgut and lascivious piping! Out on't! you set your sister here a vile example; but I come to tell you, madam, that I'll suffer no more of these midnight incantations—these amorous orgies, that steal the senses in the hearing; as they say Egyptian embalmers serve mummies, extracting the brain through the ears."* Donna Louisa utters things which are only too clever for the part. Her father having told her that the man she is to marry, though formerly a Jew, had been six weeks a Christian, her brother remarks:—"Ay, he left his old religion for an estate, and has not had time to get a new one:" whereupon she adds:—"But stands like a dead wall

* This extravagant simile is a plagiarism from Goldsmith. The eighty-fourth letter of a "Citizen of the World" concludes with the "sensible admonition of Mê, the philosopher, 'You love harmony,' says he, 'and are charmed with music. I do not blame you for hearing a fine voice, when you are in your closet with a lovely parterre under your eye, or in the night-time, while perhaps the moon diffuses her silvery rays. But is a man to carry this passion so far as to let a company of comedians, musicians, and singers grow rich upon his exhausted fortune? If so, he resembles one of those dead bodies whose brains the embalmers have picked out through its ears.'"

between church and synagogue, or like the blank leaves between the Old and New Testament." If Donna Louisa were represented as a personage of great cleverness, and did her conversation in general justify that assumption, then a sally like the foregoing would not appear, as it does, wholly misplaced.

The School for Scandal, however, is the most remarkable specimen of Sheridan's mannerism, of his straining after effect, of excessive brilliancy which dazzles and soon cloys. Its effect on the mind resembles that made on the eye by a mirror shown in the International Exhibition of 1862. This mirror was composed of highly polished prisms ranged side by side. Wherever the eye rested were seen all the colours of the rainbow. To look at the rays of light refracted from a prism is a pretty sight; but to sit in a room entirely lined with prismatic mirrors would be torture to any one but the Turkish potentate for whose enjoyment this mirror was specially designed and manufactured.

All the characters, from Maria, the blushing young girl, to Rowley, the staid and attached servant of the family, including Trip, valet to Charles Surface, utter clever things with a fluency which is amazing. Being asked what Sir Benjamin Backbite has done to make her avoid him, Maria replies, "Oh, he has done nothing —but 'tis for what he has said: his conversation is a perpetual libel on all his acquaintance." Then, giving her opinion about scandal, she says, "Well, I'll not debate how far scandal may be allowable; but in a man, I am sure, it is always contemptible. We have pride, envy, rivalship, and a thousand motives to depreciate each other; but the male slanderer must

have the cowardice of a woman before he can traduce one." Mrs. Candour expresses her view of scandal, with still greater elaboration of detail: "Why, to be sure, a tale of scandal is as fatal to the credit of a prudent lady of her stamp as a fever is generally to those of the strongest constitutions. But there is a sort of puny, sickly reputation, that is always ailing, yet will outlive the robuster characters of an hundred prudes." Sir Benjamin rivals her, however, by refining on the same idea: "True, madam; there are valetudinarians in reputation as well as constitution, who, being conscious of their weak part, avoid the least breath of air, and supply the want of stamina by care and circumspection."

Lady Teazle is an extraordinary instance of suddenly developed wit. She is represented as having been taken from a dull country home, where she passed the day working fruits in worsted, looking after the dairy, superintending the poultry-yard, making extracts from the family receipt book, and combing her Aunt Deborah's lapdog, amusing herself in the evening by drawing patterns for ruffles she had not the materials to make up, playing Pope Joan with the curate, reading a sermon to her aunt, or in strumming on an old spinnet to send her father to sleep after a fox chase. This young lady marries Sir Peter Teazle, comes to London, becomes a licentiate of the Scandalous College, and flashes out in this style: "Nay, I vow Lady Stucco is very well with the dessert after dinner; for she's just like the French fruit one cracks for mottoes — made up of paint and proverb." Replying to the remark that true wit is more nearly allied to good nature than she

is aware of, she says, "True, Sir Peter; I believe they are so near akin that they can never be united." There is no improbability, notwithstanding what she calls her "country prejudices," in Lady Teazle lending an ear to the proposals of Joseph Surface, and visiting him, at least to listen to his pretended passion, if not to dishonour herself and her husband; but it is altogether startling and improbable that she should converse with him in the following strain. In answer to Joseph's remark that, having been unjustly suspected by her husband, she owes it to the honour of her sex to outwit him, she says, "Indeed! So that, if he suspects me without cause, it follows that the best way of curing his jealousy is to give him reason for't?" Joseph uses the additional argument that her character is absolutely dying from too much health, which elicits the sparkling rejoinder, "So, so; then I perceive your prescription is, that I must sin in my own defence, and part with my virtue to preserve my reputation."

Sir Peter Teazle, whom we should no more expect to be witty than his wife, is as pointed and antithetical in his talk as the wit by nature or profession. His opening soliloquy begins thus:—"When an old bachelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect? 'Tis now six months since Lady Teazle made me the happiest of men—and I have been the most miserable dog ever since! We tift a little going to church, and fairly quarrelled before the bells had done ringing. I was more than once nearly choked with gall during the honeymoon, and had lost all comfort in life before my friends had done wishing me joy." He winds up the second scene with as telling a hit as

any of the foregoing: "Ah! Master Rowley, when an old bachelor marries a young wife, he deserves—no—the crime carries its punishment along with it." In the first dialogue with his wife, he utters sayings which are still more highly elaborated. Lady Teazle having said that her acquaintances were remarkably tenacious of reputation, he retorts: "Yes, egad, they are tenacious of reputation with a vengeance; for they don't choose anybody should have a character but themselves. Such a crew! Ah! many a wretch has rid on a hurdle who has done less mischief than those utterers of forged tales, coiners of scandal, and clippers of reputation." He grows unintelligible to ninety-nine persons in a hundred, when he says, in reply to Mrs. Candour's remark that surely he would not be so severe on those who only report what they hear, "Yes, madam, I would have law merchant for them too; and in all cases of slander currency, whenever the drawer of the lie was not to be found, the injured party should have a right to come on any of the indorsers." It is quite clear, from Mrs. Candour's next remark, that she had not the slightest notion what Sir Peter Teazle meant.

Sir Oliver Surface is a merchant who, having accumulated a large fortune in the Indies, returns home with his mouth as full of good things as his purse is of guineas. Sir Peter Teazle having told him that his nephew, Joseph Surface, is, "what a youth should be—everybody in the world speaks well of him," he replies, "I am sorry to hear it; he has too good a character to be an honest fellow. Everybody speaks well of him! Psha! then he has bowed as low to knaves and fools as to the honest dig-

nity of genius and virtue." Seeing his nephew Charles give the family pedigree to his friend Carless, to use as an auctioneer's hammer when selling the family pictures, Sir Oliver observes: "What an unnatural rogue!—an *ex post facto* parricide." He thus comments on the altered habits of servants: "Ah! Master Rowley, in my days servants were content with the follies of their masters, when they were worn a little threadbare; but now they have their vices like their birthday clothes, with the gloss on." In reply to Rowley's remark that there is no sentiment in which Joseph has such faith as that charity begins at home, he says: "And his, I presume, is of that domestic sort which never stirs abroad at all."

Old Rowley, the attached servant of the Surface family, though he speaks naturally enough on the whole, yet shines at intervals as brilliantly as the rest. He winds up a speech in the first scene of the third act, by quoting two lines from "our immortal bard;" this, however, is pardonable when compared with such a remark as the following, which he utters when instructing Sir Oliver to play the part of Mr. Premium: "And lament that a young man now must be at years of discretion before he is suffered to ruin himself." Again, when Sir Oliver Surface has an interview with his nephew Joseph, in the assumed character of Mr. Stanley, Rowley says to Sir Oliver:—"But I doubt you are come a little too abruptly. His nerves are so weak, that the sight of a poor relation may be too much for him. I should have gone first to break it to him." Sir Oliver exclaims: "Yet this is he whom Sir Peter extols as a man of the most bene-

volent way of thinking!" Rowley rejoins, with more polish than old family servants generally display: "As to his way of thinking, I cannot pretend to decide; for, to do him justice, he appears to have as much speculative benevolence as any private gentleman in the kingdom, though he is seldom so sensual as to indulge himself in the exercise of it." Trip, Charles Surface's valet, is as nimble with his tongue as with his fingers. Having requested Moses to discount a bill, and the latter asking if he had nothing to deposit as security, he replies, "Why, nothing capital of my master's wardrobe has dropped lately; but I could give you a mortgage on some of his winter clothes, with equity of redemption before November—or you shall have the reversion of the French velvet, or a post-obit; these, I should think, Moses, with a few pair of point-ruffles, as a collateral security—hey, my little fellow?"

Joseph Surface, though pre-eminently a man of sentiment, shows that he, too, can be a man of wit. When Sir Benjamin repeats his rhymed epigram, and his Uncle Crabtree exclaims: "There, ladies, done in the smack of a whip, and on horseback too," Joseph neatly adds, "A very Phœbus, mounted—indeed, Sir Benjamin." He makes love to Lady Teazle in antitheses. After assuring her that the consciousness of innocence operated to her prejudice, making her negligent of forms, careless of the world's opinion, apt to run into a thousand little imprudences, impatient of Sir Peter's temper and outrageous at his suspicions, he adds, "Now, my dear Lady Teazle, if you would but once make a trifling *faux pas*, you can't conceive how cautious you would grow, and how

ready to humour and agree with your husband." Lady Teazle asks: "Do you think so?" and Joseph replies: "Oh! I am sure on't; and then you would find all scandal would cease at once; for—in short, your character at present is like a person in a plethora, absolutely dying of too much health." More forced and affected is Joseph's language in his soliloquy after he had got rid of Sir Oliver in the guise of Stanley, the poor relation: "This is one bad effect of a good character; it invites application from the unfortunate, and there needs no small degree of address to gain the reputation of benevolence without incurring the expense. The silver ore of pure charity is an expensive article in the catalogue of a man's good qualities, whereas the sentimental French plate I use instead of it makes just as good a show, and pays no tax."

A more serious defect in this personage than the superfluity of wit or excessive elaboration of phraseology, is the too open proclamation of his villanies. The author's purpose is to paint a hypocrite who, by employing fine sentiments, masks his designs and gains his ends. Dryden, with that acuteness which was as much his distinctive characteristic as his poetic talent, justly remarks, in his preface to *Troilus and Cressida:* "To produce a villain without other reason than a natural inclination to villany is, in poetry, to produce an effect without a cause; and to make him more a villain than he has just reason to be, is to make an effect which is stronger than the cause." Now, Joseph Surface is too much of the scoundrel by profession to be a thorough-going hypocrite, a dissembler who becomes almost the dupe of his own deceit. Blifil is a far more consummate impostor. He never parades his

vice. Joseph ostentatiously avows that his sentiment is a sham, that he is but acting a part, and not living a life, when, after saying before Lady Sneerwell, "The man who does not share in the distresses of a brother, even though merited by his own misconduct, deserves ——" and she interrupts him with: "O Lud! you are going to be moral, and forget that you are among friends," he replies, "Egad, that's true! I'll keep that sentiment till I see Sir Peter." The author in making him doubtful about attaining his purpose, commits another offence against nature and probability. A man so clever, plausible, and self-assured as Joseph cannot believe in failure if he continue his career. The constant dread of utter ruin would chill his sentiment, and the foreknowledge of detection would restrain his tongue. Yet, almost at the outset, he is made to say: 'A curious dilemma, truly, my politics have run me into! I wanted, at first, only to ingratiate myself with Lady Teazle, that she might not be my enemy with Maria; and I have, I don't know how, become her serious lover. Sincerely I begin to wish that I had never made such a point of gaining so very good a character, for it has led me into so many cursed rogueries that I doubt I shall be exposed at last." After exposure has come and final discomfiture is impending, he gives vent, in conversation with Lady Sneerwell, to another and a contradictory regret: "Well, I admit I have been to blame. I confess I deviated from the direct road of wrong." To fear in the second act that his "cursed rogueries" will lead to his exposure is out of keeping with his character: to lament in the fifth act that he had "deviated from the direct road of wrong" is to render the

incongruity the more conspicuous and the less excusable.

Against Charles Surface no objection can be made on the score of his wit. He utters smart things by the score, but this is what we are taught to expect from a clever scapegrace, whose spirits rise when his fortune falls, and who is supposed to be never so natural as when he is spending his last guinea, or parting with his last acre, with a smile on his face and an epigram on his tongue. This dashing spendthrift is rewarded with the hand of Maria and a second fortune from his uncle, Sir Oliver. In his case, levity appears to be the best policy, and a jest the surest wisdom.

Overcharged though *The School for Scandal* is with good things, and artificial as are the characters, taken one by one, it is yet as excellent an acting play as *The Rivals*, and the situations are most telling; the mode in which the screen is turned to account is an inimitable stage effect.*

Far less laboured than Sheridan's other pieces, his farce *The Critic*, is one of his happiest productions. Modelled on *The Rehearsal*, it is no servile copy. Bayes is but the caricature of Dryden, whom the whole piece turns into ridicule. Mr. Puff, on the contrary,

* Referring to criticisms on the use he had made of a screen in his *West Indian*, Cumberland says, "I could name one now living who has made such happy use of his screen in a comedy of the very first merit, that if Aristotle himself had written a whole chapter professedly against *screens*, and Jerry Collier had edited it with notes and illustrations, I would not have placed Lady Teazle out of ear-shot to have saved their ears from the pillory; but if either of these worthies could have pointed out an expedient to have got Joseph Surface off the stage, pending that scene, with any reasonable conformity to nature, they would have done more good to the drama than either of them have done harm; and that is saying a great deal."—Memoirs of Richard Cumberland written by himself, vol. i., p. 303.

is a wholly original creation; he is as natural, yet as impersonal as Falstaff. Sir Fretful Plagiary, who is a caricature of Cumberland, is but a subordinate personage, and is so much of a stage character that he might easily have been drawn without the existence of a living model. One of the dramatic faults of Sheridan is glanced at, perhaps not unintentionally, in the comments upon the dialogue between the Justice and the Constable; Mr. Sneer says: "But, Mr. Puff, I think not only the Justice, but the Clown seems to talk in as high a style as the first hero among them." Mr. Puff replies, "Heaven forbid that they should not in a free country! Sir, I am not for making slavish distinctions, and giving all the fine language to the upper sort of people." Mr. Puff's apology for plagiarism is an excellent satire upon the practice. Mr. Sneer, referring to the first line in the Beefeater's soliloquy says: "Haven't I heard that line before?" Mr. Puff replies: "No, I fancy not; where, pray?" Mr. Dangle interposes with, "Yes, I think there is something like it in *Othello*." Mr. Puff, "Gad! now you put me in mind on't, I believe there is; but that's of no consequence; all that can be said is, that two people happened to hit on the same thought—and Shakespeare made use of it first, that's all."

It is extraordinary that a dramatist who wrote so little as Sheridan should have produced plays which have not only survived for a century without any loss of freshness or popularity, but, when well acted, now attract even more numerous audiences than when they were first performed. Moreover, these pieces have added a larger proportion of allusions and phrases to daily speech and writing than any three pieces by all other English

dramatists, Shakespeare alone excepted. A few only need be cited: every reader will recall them by the score. Bob Acres is one of the accepted types of poltroonery, and his courage oozing out as it were at the palms of his hands, is an illustration of it. Sir Lucius O'Trigger has immortalised himself by the saying: "Pray, Sir, be easy; the quarrel is a very pretty quarrel as it stands." The very name of Mrs. Malaprop has been used more than once to clench an argument. Her inimitable confusion of words, "She's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of Nile," will endure as long as the language. "I own the soft impeachment," is another of her verbal legacies to posterity. The words, "You shall see them on a beautiful quarto page, where a neat rivulet of text shall meander through a meadow of margin," have frequently been repeated without being always attributed to their rightful originator, Sir Benjamin Backbite. "Too civil by half," is another saying which it may not always be remembered is an "aside" of Sir Oliver Surface. There is no doubt as to the paternity of "One damned good-natured friend or another," yet it might surprise some persons to hear that Mr. Sneer is the father of "A most happy thought, certainly;" and also of "No scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I hope." Mr. Puff, in addition to his receipts for puffing, has furnished our literature with the phrase: "When they do agree on the stage, their unanimity is wonderful," while two lines from his tragedy will be quoted as often as the line he appropriated from *Othello*:—

> "The Spanish fleet thou cannot see—because
> It is not yet in sight."

It is at once the excellence and defect of Sheridan's plays that they are much better adapted for the stage than for the closet. The comedies of Shakespeare appear as lifelike when read as when they are performed; in those of Sheridan the artificiality which disenchants the reader can be entirely disguised by good acting; the personages when they talk and strut on the boards may, for the moment, be supposed to be real representatives of actual men and women. This is the peculiarity also of the comedies of Congreve, with which those of Sheridan were contrasted by his contemporaries, whose characters, as Johnson acutely remarked, are commonly fictitious and artificial, with very little of nature and not much of life, and whose personages are a kind of intellectual gladiators; every sentence is to ward or strike; the contest of smartness is never intermitted; whose wit is a meteor playing to and fro with alternate coruscations. The success of Sheridan consisted in preserving cleverness of dialogue without grossness of allusion or immorality in the plot. A modern English theatrical audience is not too exacting in the matter of natural truth: amusing scenes and good acting delight and satisfy it. Sound morality must also be inculcated. Joseph Surface, the consummate hypocrite and unscrupulous rascal, must be exposed and punished. Lady Teazle must be more sinned against than sinning. In the wit, there must not be a taint of lewdness; in the action, there must not be any parade of vice; the result must be as improving as a sermon. Subject to these conditions, the play has to be composed; if they are faithfully observed, it may be applauded. It is obvious that a modern dramatist cannot, in these circumstances, hold

up the mirror to nature and make the scenic display a representation in miniature of every phase in human life.

The public for which Sheridan wrote, and which he gratified to the full, is essentially the same as that of our day; hence, while it would be as impossible to revive the comedies of Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Wycherley, as to revive the old miracle plays, it is as easy to attract an audience by his pieces now as it was when they first appeared. Their very artificiality has helped to preserve them. They cannot become antiquated until genuine humour shall be declared flat and unsatisfying, and the tongue of scandal shall be mute.

III.

APPEARANCE AND SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the completeness of Sheridan's triumph on the boards of Drury Lane Theatre, he aspired to be the hero of still more splendid triumphs in the arena of the Legislature. He is the only example in our history of a dramatist, having no superior among his contemporaries, becoming also the acknowledged equal of contemporary orators, and achieving an almost unrivalled Parliamentary reputation in opposition to no common obstacles. In 1780, he entered the House of Commons as the chosen representative for the independent borough of Stafford, when William Pitt took his seat for the first time, as the nominee of Sir James Lowther, for the pocket borough of Appleby. Without distinction due to birth or the countenance of a powerful patron, he stood forward and battled for reputation, inspired by ambition and sustained by his talents. All that he had done as a playwright excited the curiosity and, in some degree, aroused the jealousy of the House. A man who becomes a member of Parliament with a ready-made reputation is criticized far more severely, and is in far greater danger of failing, than the novice who is entirely guiltless of popularity.

The ordeal is as trying as that of proving innocence by walking over red-hot ploughshares. No mercy is shown to those who betray the slightest imperfection.

The finest intellects and most fluent tongues have succumbed before the test. Addison, though he rose to be Secretary of State, saved himself from ignominious failure as a speaker, and possibly from insult, by remaining a silent member. When Steele rose to address the House, he was abashed and forced to sit down by shouts of "Tatler, Tatler," and had the mortification of hearing the envious and the dullards audibly whisper: "It is not so easy a thing to speak in the House; he fancies he can do so because he can scribble." Had Johnson hearkened to the wishes of his friends and obtained a seat in Parliament, he would have found the men for whom he was more than a match individually, his jealous and powerful rivals collectively. Erskine, who could mould a jury at his pleasure, and whose seductive voice could almost exorcise prejudice from a hostile Court, could never influence a single division in the House of Commons, nor could he always gain an appreciative hearing. Flood, who came from Ireland with the fame of a Demosthenes, failed to gain the ear of the House. The greatest glories of O'Connell as an orator are not enshrined in our Parliamentary annals. Lord Jeffrey, whose eminence as a critical writer was undisputed by any contemporary, was heard with bare courtesy when he addressed the House of Commons. Sir James Mackintosh, who entered Parliament with the lustre of a powerful forensic display undimmed, and with the reputation of being most fascinating in conversation, could seldom command the attention of his audience. Macaulay's spoken essays in the House of Commons were as gorgeous and finished pieces of rhetoric as the essays he contributed to

the *Edinburgh Review*, yet Macaulay never gained high honours as a Parliamentary debater. Bulwer Lytton delivered many polished orations in the House of Commons, but he did not equal as a speaker the fame he acquired as a novelist. It is a proof of Grattan's genius that the oratorical sway he wielded over the Parliament of Ireland was felt and acknowledged by the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. Though John Stuart Mill gave utterance to some things which it required great moral courage to express, yet his Parliamentary career did not increase his world-wide fame as a thinker. In addition to his extraordinary popularity as a novelist, Mr. Disraeli has risen to the first place in the estimation of Parliament, and in this respect he divides with Sheridan the crown of victory over almost insuperable difficulties.

When William Pitt first addressed the House, he proved himself one of its ornaments. Old members rejoiced to find that the excellences of the elder Pitt were reproduced in the younger: the House of Commons could not but welcome a speaker who showed himself master of the traditional Parliamentary style. With Sheridan, it was otherwise. He failed utterly to enlist the sympathies of his hearers, and he failed, as Mr. Disraeli did, by aiming too high. Like Mr. Disraeli, at a later period, he was worsted, but not dismayed. He prophetically told Woodfall in the gallery that he had it in him and it would come out, with as much truth as Mr. Disraeli told the House that the time would come when he should get a patient hearing. Sheridan tried again, and it did come out of him; but his success was nearly as perilous as his failure.

It is a rule, to which there are few exceptions, that a man who once obtains the reputation of being a wit may retain it without always saying things of extreme brilliancy, and will even find his most ordinary remarks quoted as utterances of great cleverness. Let such a man, however, strive to get credit for the possession of more serious qualities, and his attempts will be treated as jokes. Few men have ever spoken or written more sensibly than Sydney Smith, yet for one who would acknowledge that he was wise, ninety-nine would contend that he was only amusing. The young lady who was tickled and laughed heartily when he said grace at a dinner party, was not a whit more silly than the multitude which considered that he made fun of everything. In the House of Commons, this prejudice is even more deeply rooted than in society at large. The privileged joker of the House is always a favourite speaker; but is only laughed at when he no longer aims at making others laugh with him. Thus it was that when Sheridan had established a reputation for saying witty things, the House welcomed his rising as they would have applauded the appearance of a personage in *The School for Scandal*. He felt himself obliged to prepare for his appearances with as much labour and forethought as he exercised when polishing witticisms for one of his plays, and the result was that his speeches abound in paragraphs which would have graced a comedy.

The following passage in a speech against the Administration formed by Pitt after the dismissal of the Coalition Ministry is purely dramatic in manner and point. Referring to the gentlemen he saw on the

Treasury Bench, he said they were divided into two parts—the one composed of the supporters of Lord North, the other of his opponents. "These gentlemen, speaking to each other, might thus address each other: one might say, 'I supported Lord North during the whole of his administration, but left him at last, when I found he had formed a coalition with that abominable man Charles Fox.' Another might reply, 'And I joined Mr. Fox for many years in his opposition to Government; till at last I found it necessary to abandon him, when he disgraced himself by a coalition with that abominable man Lord North.' If the state of the public credit, and the funds, should become the subject of discussion in that House, one of the members of the Treasury Bench may very probably say, 'It was the cursed American War of Lord North that brought this ruin upon our funds.' This would instantly call up his friend on the same Bench, who would immediately reply, 'No; the American War was a just and constitutional war; it was the opposition given to it by the rebel encourager Charles Fox, which caused the failure of it, and this brought ruin on the country.' Thus a Treasury formed on anti-coalition principles was itself a chain of coalitions." *

Equally in his farcical vein is the following comment on the ministerial amendments to Pitt's East India Bill:—"It was plain that twenty-one new clauses were added, which were to be known by the letters, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, V, W; therefore it was to be hoped that some gentleman would add three more clauses for X, Y, Z, to

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 69.

make the alphabet complete; which would then serve as a horn-book for the present ministry." *

Another laboured passage in his dramatic vein occurs in his speech condemning the plan of the Duke of Richmond, Master-General of the Ordnance, for fortifying the coasts:—"The noble Duke deserved the warmest panegyrics for the striking proofs he had given of his genius as an engineer, which appeared even in the planning and construction of the paper in his hand. The professional ability of the Master-General shone as conspicuously there as it could upon our coasts. He had made it an argument of posts, and conducted his reasoning upon principles of trigonometry as well as logic. There were certain detached data, like advanced works to keep the enemy at a distance from the main object in debate. Strong provisions covered the flanks of his assertions. His very queries were in casemates. No impression, therefore, was to be made on this fortress of sophistry by desultory observations; and it was necessary to sit down before it, and assail it by regular approaches. It was fortunate, however, to observe, that notwithstanding all the skill displayed by the noble and literary engineer, his mode of defence on paper was open to the same objection which had been urged against his other fortifications; that if his adversary got possession of one of his posts, it became strength against him, and the means of subduing the whole line of his argument." †

Some years later when a panic, fomented by the Ministry, had caused the wealthier and more foolish

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 86.
† *Ib.*, vol. i., p. 95.

section of the nation to tremble at the prospect of the worst excesses of the French Revolution being repeated in this country, Sheridan ridiculed alike the notion and the Duke of Richmond with much skill: "A noble Duke had formerly been of opinion that there was nothing to be seen but danger for want of a Parliamentary reform; but he had so elevated himself of late upon fortifications of his own creating, and availed himself of his great power of discernment, that he was now able to discover plots, conspiracies, and treasons under the garb of a Parliamentary reform, or under any reform. The alarm had been brought forward in great pomp and form on Saturday morning. At night all the mail coaches were stopped; the Duke of Richmond stationed himself, among other curiosities, at the Tower; a great municipal officer too had made a discovery exceedingly beneficial to the people of this country—he meant the Lord Mayor of London—who had discovered that, at the King's Arms in Cornhill, was a debating society, where principles of the most dangerous tendency were propagated; where people went to buy treason at sixpence a head; and where it was retailed to them by the glimmering of an inch of candle; and five minutes, to be measured by the glass, were to be allowed to each traitor to perform his part in overturning the State." *

Two years later, when opposing the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, he spoke in the same strain, and with the same antithetic effect. He said that he had attended the trials for sedition, and heard Lord Chief-Justice Eyre remark of one case in his summing-up,

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 165.

that "it was an ostentatious and boastful conspiracy, and that it was much in favour of the accused that they had neither men, money, nor zeal to effect the purposes with which they were charged. On the first trial one pike was produced, that was afterwards withdrawn from mere shame. A formidable instrument was talked of to be employed against the cavalry; it appeared upon evidence to be a tee-totum in a window at Sheffield. There was a camp in a back shop, an arsenal provided with nine muskets, and an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling; all to be directed against the whole armed force and established Government of Great Britain."

In 1800, speaking on the proposed negotiation with France, he expressed strong sense in his pointed style: "It is strange, Sir, is it not, that not a man on the continent could be found who would take part in a cause of such a nature without being subsidized. We have been obliged to bribe them to do their duty, to protect their property, and to defend their religion. We have been obliged to be the recruiting-sergeants and paymasters-general to Europe. . . . When you talk of a successful war, you must mean one that has accomplished the objects for which it was undertaken. Have you deterred other countries from aggrandizement and rapine? Have you restored the Bourbons? No; but you have taken Tricomalee. Have you re-established the *noblesse* of France? No; but you have taken Ceylon. Have you restored the orders of France? No; but you have taken the Cape." Again, satirically defending Addington against charges of incompetency, he used the same style, with the addition of a local colouring which would assuredly

gratify the House :—"What did these gentlemen expect from the present Chancellor of the Exchequer? We treated him when in the chair of this House with the respect he merited. He has, I believe, Sir, over our present worthy Speaker, the advantage in attitude; but did they expect that when he was Minister he was to stand up and call Europe to order? Was he to send Mr. Colman, the Serjeant-at-Arms, to the Baltic, and order the Northern Powers to the bar of the House? Was he to see the powers of Germany, scrambling like members over the benches, and say, 'Gentlemen must take their places'? Was he expected to cast an eye to the Tuscan gallery, and exclaim that 'Strangers must withdraw'? Was he to stand across the Rhine, and say, 'The Germans to the right, and the French to the left'?"*

Twice he exercised his ingenuity in weaving phrases to characterize Bonaparte; firstly, in 1800, when he believed that the head of the French nation was not indisposed to peace; secondly, when it was believed that he was aiming at universal empire; and in both cases the method is identical. On the first occasion, he thus defended him against those who distrusted his professions :—"But, Sir, we have seen religion obtain a tolerant exemption in her favour under the government of this atheist; we have seen the faith of treaties observed under the government of this perfidious adventurer—the arts and sciences find protection under the government of this plunderer; the sufferings of humanity have been alleviated under this ferocious usurper; the arms of France have been led to victory by this tyro in the art and practice of war." On

* Speeches, vol. iii., pp. 392, 403, 417.

the second occasion, he could not think with patience of petty squabbles, "while Bonaparte is grasping the nations; while he is surrounding France, not with that iron frontier for which the wish and childish ambition of Louis XIV. was so eager, but with kingdoms of his own creation; securing the gratitude of higher minds as the hostage, and the fears of others as pledges of his safety. His are no ordinary fortifications. His martello towers are thrones; sceptres tipped with crowns are the palisadoes of his entrenchments, and kings are his sentinels." *

Not unfrequently, he indulged in declamation and in the enunciation of general principles, and even then the special turn of his mind towards antithesis is clearly discernible amidst a multitude of words. An example is the following contrast drawn between the French and English nations:—"I will not, therefore, admit the inference or the argument, that because a people, bred under a proud, insolent, and grinding despotism, maddened by the recollection of former injuries, and made savage by the observation of former cruelties; a people, in whose minds no respect for property or law ever could have existed, because property never had been secured to them, and law had never protected them; a people separated and divided into classes by the strongest and harshest lines of distinction, generating envy and smothered malice in the lower ranks, and pride and insolence in the higher; that the actions of such a people at any time, much less in the hour of frenzy and of fury, provoked and goaded by the arms and menaces of the surrounding despots that assailed them, should furnish an inference or ground

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 535.

on which to estimate the temper, character, or feelings of the people of Great Britain; of a people who, though sensible of many abuses which disfigure the constitution, were yet not insensible to its many and invaluable blessings; a people who reverenced the laws of their country, because those laws shielded and protected all alike; a people among whom all that was advantageous in private acquisition, all that was honourable in public ambition, was equally open to the efforts, the industry, and the abilities of all; among whom progress and rise in society and public estimation was an ascending slope, as it were, without a break or landing-place, among whom no sullen line of demarcation separated and cut off the several orders from each other, but all was one blended tint, from the deepest shade that veiled the meanest occupations of laborious industry to the brightest hue that glittered in the luxurious pageantry of title, wealth, and power. I should not, therefore, look to the example of France; for, between the feelings, the tempers, and social disposition towards each other, much less towards the Governments which they obeyed, of nations so differently constituted and of such different habits, I assert that no comparison could be made which reason and philosophy ought not to spurn at with contempt and indignation." *

In the same strain, but with less redundancy of epithet, the following skilful apology for the excesses of the French Revolution is composed:—"But it is said, that all the subsequent horrors and bloodshed proceeded from the influence of a club. Yes, they proceeded from the influence of a club, but it was

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 456-7.

the Club of Pilnitz. That associated combination of despots were the first promoters of all those dreadful scenes which have since been acted on the stage of France. There is nothing so cowardly or so cruel as panic. When the French found that powerful combination formed to crush their rising revolution, panic and terror took the place of reason and moderation. To the mild maxims and equitable principles of the early supporters of the revolution, succeeded a system of tyranny and oppression. Nothing is so mild and gentle as courage. On the contrary, panic rules by panic; terror governs by terror; hence we may account for the atrocities of the successive tyrants of France, who, knowing that their throne was founded in fear, were sensible that it could only be cemented by blood." *

The particular effects in which Sheridan chiefly delighted, cannot have been absent from his famous address to the House of Commons advocating the impeachment of Warren Hastings. Unfortunately, the report of that memorable oration is very meagre. Yet, scanty as are the portions which have been preserved, enough remains to show the style which the speaker employed; the following passage warrants the conclusion that this extraordinary oratorical effort had all the distinguishing characteristics of his other speeches :—

"He remembered to have heard an honourable and learned gentleman (Mr. Dundas) remark, that there was something in the first frame and constitution of the Company, which extended the sordid principles of their origin over all their successive operations; connecting with their civil policy, and even with their boldest

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 17,

achievements, the meanness of a pedlar and the profligacy of pirates. Alike in the political and in the military line could be observed auctioneering ambassadors and trading generals; and thus we saw a revolution brought about by affidavits; an army employed in executing an arrest; a town besieged on a note of hand; a prince dethroned for the balance of an account. Thus it was they exhibited a government which united the mock majesty of a bloody sceptre and the little traffic of a merchant's counting-house, wielding a truncheon with one hand, and picking a pocket with the other." *

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 235.

IV.

SPEECH IN WESTMINSTER HALL AGAINST HASTINGS.

NONE of Sheridan's oratorical performances dazzled and gratified his contemporaries so much as the speech in Westminster Hall, of three days' duration, wherein he summed up the evidence on the second charge of impeachment against Warren Hastings. This was the greatest occasion he ever had for justifying before the public the reputation he had earned within the walls of St. Stephen's. The curiosity to hear him was great, and the expectations of his audience were raised to the highest pitch; yet he amply satisfied the curiosity, and fully gratified the expectations. Had he done nothing else, that one effort would have immortalized his name: added to his other performances, it caused him to be regarded as a genius among our orators.

This speech is included in the collection given to the world immediately after his death by a "Constitutional Friend," who remarks in the preface that:—"No efforts have been spared to collect and arrange accurate accounts of every speech delivered by the late Mr. Sheridan; and those efforts proving successful, it may boldly be asserted, that pages more abounding with brilliant wit, depth, solidity, and sound argu-

ment, have never been presented to the public. Many of these speeches have been candidly admitted, by all parties, to exhibit every oratorical effect the human mind is capable of suggesting." From this collection, the extracts I have quoted, illustrative of his oratory, are taken. How far the reports are accurate cannot now be determined. Sheridan himself said, referring to a speech by Mr. Dundas, "that it was too correct for a newspaper report, though these reports were frequently very accurate." * Sometimes the reporter candidly admits his inability "to follow him in detail from memory." On a matter so important as his defence of Fox's East India Bill, the following is the account given for the information of those who were not present in the House:—"The serious part of his argument over, Mr. Sheridan came to the more pleasant part, and took up the several quotations from Shakespeare, Milton, and the Book of Revelations of Mr. Wilberforce, Mr. Arden, and Mr. Scott, foiling them each with their own weapons, and citing, with the most happy ease and correctness, passages from almost the same pages that controverted their quotations, and told strongly for the bill. He quoted three more verses from the Revelations, by which he metamorphosed the beast with seven heads, with crowns on them, into seven angels, clothed in pure and white linen. One side of the House was extremely entertained with the turns Mr. Sheridan gave to what he quoted." † From such a report as the foregoing nothing can be gathered as to the real character of the speech. In the renowned impeachment speech

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 15.
† Speeches, vol. i., p. 59.

these highly-wrought passages abound; yet, when the speech itself is read in the collection made by a "Constitutional Friend," it is difficult to imagine how it could ever have impressed those who heard it, or been regarded as anything better than a long drawn-out piece of pretentious bombast. Such an opinion would be an unjust one, if based upon the best-known and commonly accepted report, which is alike incorrect and misleading, and gives a singularly distorted notion of the speech as a whole, as well as an utterly false view of particular passages. It is probable that the newspaper reporters of those days laboured under even greater disadvantages in Westminster Hall than when pursuing their avocations in either House of Parliament. Their account of Parliamentary debates may be substantially accurate, notwithstanding that their account of the proceedings at the trial of Hastings is wholly misleading. Unhappily for Sheridan's reputation as an orator, an imperfect version of his speech delivered in Westminster Hall is most frequently read, cited, and criticized. The more important, then, is it that what he said should be perused in an absolutely trustworthy form.

The late Sir George Cornewall Lewis, having learnt that verbatim short-hand reports of the speeches of the managers and counsel at the trial of Warren Hastings, made by Mr. Gurney's staff of reporters for the Government of the day, were in existence, made arrangements for their publication. Moore says, in his Life of Sheridan, that he had in his possession an authentic manuscript copy of the short-hand report taken of Sheridan's speech, and he quotes some extracts from it. But, till this official version appeared in

print, it was impossible to compare what the several speakers said with what they are credited with saying. Moore did not even take the trouble to contrast the passages he quoted with the current version and with the correct one.

The current version does not profess to be verbatim. Much of it is in the third person; but many passages are in the first person, and are printed within inverted commas, apparently to show that they are literally accurate, the more telling words and phrases being italicized. The first of these occurs in the exordium:—"The unfortunate gentleman at the bar is no mighty object in my mind. Amidst the series of mischiefs, *to my sense*, seeming to surround him, what is he but a petty *nucleus*, involved in its *lamina*, scarcely seen or thought of?" *

The correct version is much simpler and perfectly intelligible: "So far from it, that the unfortunate "gentleman at your bar is scarcely in my contempla- "tion when my mind is engaged in this business; that "it then holds but two ideas—a sincere abhorrence of "the crimes and a sanguine hope of the remedy." †

The next passage may have been deemed an improvement on the original; certainly it is different:— "It is not the peering suspicion of apprehending guilt; it is not any popular abhorrence of its widespread consequences; it is not the secret consciousness in the bosom of the judge, which can excite the vengeance of the law and authorise its infliction! No. In this good land, as high as it is happy, because as just as it is free, all is definite, equitable, and exact. The laws

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 56.
† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 483.

must be satisfied before infliction ensues. And ere a hair of the head can be plucked, LEGAL GUILT must be established by LEGAL PROOF."*

There is as much rhetoric in the true version, and more sense:—"No, my lords; we know well that it "is the glory of this constitution that not the general "fame or character of any man—not the weight or "power of any prosecutors, no plea of moral or political "expediency—not even the secret consciousness of "guilt which may live in the bosom of the judge—can "justify any British court in passing any sentence, to "touch a hair of the head or an atom in any respect "of the property, of the fame, of the liberty, of the "poorest or meanest subject that breathes the air of "this just and free land. We know, my lords, that "there can be no legal guilt without legal proof; "that the rule which defines the evidence is as much "the law of the land as that which creates the crime. "It is upon that ground we mean to stand." †

Nonsense and absurdity predominate in the following passage: "But though he stated the difficulties which the managers had to encounter, he did not mean to say that the proofs, which they had adduced, were in any degree defective. 'Weak, no doubt, in some parts, and incompetent, and yet more deplorable, as undistinguished by any compunctious visitings of repenting accomplices, but yet enough, and enough in sure validity, to abash the front of guilt no longer hid, and flash conviction on conscientious judges.'" ‡

Sheridan's actual statement differed in meaning as well as phraseology: "Having said this, I think it

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 59, 60.
† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 486.
‡ Speeches, vol. ii., p. 66.

"extremely possible that your lordships may imagine "that I am begging indulgence and allowance for "weak and incompetent evidence. No, my lords; I "will be bold to say that there is now before you, "upon this charge, a mass of full, complete, competent "evidence—strong as ever abashed the confidence of "courageous guilt, or brought conviction home to the "hearts of conscientious judges." *

Next we have a dramatic passage in the style to which Sheridan was partial: "He (Warren Hastings) had also put his *defences* into commission, to be exercised by the same gentlemen. 'These, like raw materials, the master workman distributes about him to all hands in waiting. His words are to be strung—arguments spun—passages are to be woven. He puts his conscience into departments;—Major Scott, says he, take care of my consistency; Mr. Middleton, you have my *memory* in commission! Prove me a financier, Mr. Shore—Answer for me, Mr. Holt (all journeymen, good enough for the House of Commons, though not for your lordships): help, one and all, to bear me up under the bare pressure of my laurels, the burden of my glory! Refreshen, and save me from the calentures of my state, from the peril of my own panegyric.'" †

The real version is not only as dramatic as the false one, but is very effective. It is a good specimen of the passages which must have made a strong impression on the audience. Moreover, it proves how Sheridan continued in Westminster Hall to employ the manner which he had carefully cultivated in the House of Commons: "He (Warren Hastings) knowing, no

* Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 487.
† Speeches, vol. ii., p. 62.

"doubt, the accusation of the Commons had been "drawn up by a Committee, thought it necessary, in "point of punctilio, to answer it by a Committee. One "furnishes the raw material of fact; the second spins "the argument; the third twines up the conclusion. "While Mr. Hastings, with a master's eye, is cheering "and looking over this loom, he says to one, 'You "'have got my good faith in your hand—you my "'veracity to manage. Mr. Shore, I hope you will "'make me a good financier. Mr. Middleton, you "'have my humanity in commission.' When it is "done, he brings it to the House of Commons, and "says,—'I was equal to the task. I knew the diffi- "'culties, but I scorned them. Here is the truth; "'and, if the truth will convict me, I am content "'myself to be the channel of it.' His friends hold "up their hands and say,—'What noble magnanimity! "This must be the effect of conscious innocence.' It "is so received; it is so argued: it fails of its effect. "Then says Mr. Hastings, 'That my defence! No, "'mere journeyman's work: good enough for the Com- "'mons, but not fit for your lordships' consideration.' "He then calls upon his counsel to save him: 'I fear "'none of my accusers' evidence. I know some of "'them well. I know the weakness of their memory, "'and the strength of their attachment. I fear no "'testimony but my own. Save me from the peril "'of my own panegyric: rescue me from that, and I "'shall be safe.'"*

It is unnecessary to multiply instances showing that the reporter, when professedly most exact, wholly missed the point, yet the following passage will show

* Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 490.

not only that he blundered, but how skilfully Sheridan made his hits :—"Not a word was then mentioned of the strange rebellion, which was afterwards conjured up, and of which the *existence* and the *notoriety* were equally a secret—a disaffection which was at its height at the very time when the Begums were dispensing their liberality to the Nabob, and exercising the greatest generosity to the English officers in distress!—a disturbance, in short, without its parallel in history, which was raised by two *women*—carried on by two eunuchs —and finally suppressed by an affidavit."*

"The existence of this [rebellion] was not the secret, "but the notoriety of it was the secret. The Nawab "never once heard of it. It was a rebellion which had "for its object the destruction of no human creature "but those who planned it. It was a rebellion which, "according to Mr. Middleton's expression, no man, "either horse or foot, ever marched to quell. The "Chief Justice was the only man who took the field "against it. The force around, against whom it was "raised, instantly withdrew to give it elbow room; "and then it was a rebellion which perversely showed "itself in acts of hospitality to the Nawab whom it "was to dethrone, and to the English whom it was to "extirpate. It was a rebellion plotted by two feeble "old women, headed by two eunuchs and suppressed "by an affidavit." †

One of the short passages often quoted or referred to

* Speeches, vol ii., p. 67.

† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 507. A third version of this passage is given in a letter from Mr. Storer to Mr. Eden: "Sheridan's account of the rebellion was very good; he said it was raised by two *old women*, headed by *two eunuchs*, and quelled by an affidavit."—Lord Auckland's Journal and Correspondence, vol. ii., p. 211.

as an excellent specimen of Sheridan's wit is to be found in the speech attributed to him, but not in the report of that which he uttered. "He had sworn once—then again—and made nothing of it; then comes he with another, and swears a third time; and *in company* does better. *Single-handed* he can do nothing, but succeeds by *platoon swearing* and *volleys of oaths.*" *

Something in the style of the foregoing passage occurs in the first scene of *The Scheming Lieutenant*, but the following were the words actually spoken in Westminster Hall:—"I imagine your lordships will "now again think we have done with Doohd Sing. "No such thing. Here he is again, the third time, "swearing before Elijah Impey. But he is not to be "trusted by himself; he is a bad one single-handed, "and, as it was a military duty, he is coupled with "somebody else; he is joined with Mir Ahmud Ali, "subadar, and at last he hits the mark." †

Where the blundering is so gross, it is difficult to marshal the several passages in their due order of absurdity, and almost impossible to select the one which merits the crown for incoherence. Yet the following reference to the rebellion with which the Begums were charged, of which mention has already been made, cannot easily be surpassed in its own peculiar line. Sheridan is made to say he could find no trace of this rebellion: "The best antiquarian in our Society would be, after all, never the wiser! Let him look where he would, where can he find any vestige of battle, or a single blow? In this rebellion there is no soldier, neither horse nor foot—not a man

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 384.
† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 558.

is known fighting—no office order survives, not an express is to be seen. His Great Rebellion, as notorious as *our Forty-five*, passed away—unnatural, but not raging—*beginning* in *nothing*, and ending, no doubt, just as it began! If rebellion, my Lords, can thus engender unseen, it is time for us to look about. What hitherto has been *dramatic* may become *historical*; Knightsbridge may at this moment be invested; and all that is left us nothing but the forlorn hope of being dealt with, according to the statute, by the sound of the Riot Act, and the sight, if it can be, of another Elijah." *

"With regard to the first charge, which is a charge "of direct, actual, rebellion, I do protest that, in order "to satisfy my own mind as much as I could, I have "been hunting, with all the industry at least, though "not with the acuteness, of any antiquarian that ever "belonged to the Antiquaries' Society, to find at what "period this rebellion actually existed, and I have not "found any one thing to guide me to the period of "its existence. There never was a rebellion so con- "cealed. We asked Mr. Middleton whether any battle "was fought anywhere? None, he owns, that ever he "heard of. 'Did any one man, horse or foot, march "'to suppress this rebellion?' 'None.' 'Did you ever "'hear any orders given for any troops to march to "'suppress it?' 'None.' The rebellion seems clearly "to have died a natural death, though raised certainly "for a most unnatural object. But if this rebellion "really did exist, it is impossible to treat the idea "seriously; and it must have been a merry scene

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 80, 81.

"when Mr. Hastings first conceived the strange im-
"probable fiction, when he first entertained the idea
"of persuading the Directors that they had entered
"into such a plot. It is impossible to know when
"and where there may not be a rebellion. While we
"are sitting here there may be a rebellion at Knights-
"bridge of the most fatal tendency that ever was; for
"the celebrated account of that army which has given
"celebrity to that village was an ostentatious display
"of pomp and military parade compared to that with
"which this was conducted."*

The perusal of the current version has not only left an unfavourable impression of the speech as a whole, but has excited surprise how any audience could listen with patience to the apostrophes in it. Certainly, it is not in his elevated passages that Sheridan excels, yet he is less guilty than has been supposed of talking in the style of a schoolboy charmed with bad metaphors and entirely wanting in judgment. His declamation about filial piety is not to be condemned on the evidence of the gentleman who misreported this speech. The genuine passage is not free from alloy; the spurious one is wholly composed of base metal. This is what has been attributed to him, and for which he has been ridiculed:—"Filial piety! It is the primal bond of society—it is that instinctive principle which, panting for its proper good, soothes, unbidden, each sense and sensibility of man! It now quivers on every lip! it now beams from every eye! It is an emanation of that gratitude which, softening under the sense of recollected good, is eager to own the vast countless debt it ne'er, alas!

* Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 579.

can pay for so many long years of unceasing solicitudes, honourable self-denials, life-preserving cares! It is that part of our practice where duty drops its awe! where reverence refines into love! It asks no aid of memory! it needs not the deductions of reason! Pre-existing, paramount over all, whether law or human rule, few arguments can increase and none can diminish it! It is the sacrament of our nature!—not only the duty, but the indulgence of man—it is his first great privilege—it is amongst his last most endearing delights!—it causes the bosom to glow with reverberated love!—it requites the visitations of nature, and returns the blessings that have been received!—it fires emotion into vital principle—it renders habituated instinct into a master-passion—sways all the sweetest energies of man—hangs over each vicissitude of all that must pass away—aids the melancholy virtues in their last sad tasks of life, to cheer the languors of decrepitude and age—explores the thought—elucidates the aching eye, and breathes sweet consolation even in the awful moment of dissolution!"*

What he did say might fairly be criticized:—"Filial love—the morality, the instinct, the sacrament "of nature—a duty; or, rather let me say, it is mis-"called a duty, for it flows from the heart without "effort—its delight—its indulgence—its enjoyment! "It is guided not by the slow dictates of reason; it "awaits not encouragement from reflection or from "thought; it asks no aid of memory; it is an innate "but active consciousness of having been the object "of a thousand tender solicitudes, a thousand waking, "watchful cares, of meek anxiety and patient sacri-

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 117.

"fices, unremarked and unrequited by the object. "It is a gratitude founded upon a conviction of "obligations not remembered, but the more binding "because not remembered, because conferred before "the tender reason could acknowledge or the infant "memory record them—a gratitude and affection "which no circumstances should subdue, and which "few can strengthen—a gratitude [in] which even "injury from the object, though it may blend regret, "should never breed resentment—and affection which "can be increased only by the decay of those to whom "we owe it—then most fervent when the tremulous 'voice of age, resistless in its feebleness, inquires for "the natural protectors of its cold decline." *

Not the least surprising thing in the current version is the way in which passages have been expanded to suit the reporter's notion of fine writing and forcible statement. The following, though long regarded as Sheridan's nonsense, is nearly altogether the gratuitous nonsense of the reporter:— "Oh Faith! oh Justice!" exclaimed Mr. Sheridan, "I conjure you by your sacred names to depart for a moment from this place, though it be your peculiar residence; nor hear your names profaned by such a sacrilegious combination as that which I am now compelled to repeat!—where all the fair forms of nature and art, truth and peace, policy and honour, shrank back aghast from the deleterious shade!—where all existences, nefarious and vile, had sway!—where, amidst the black agents on one side, and Middleton and Impey on the other, the toughest head, the most unfeeling heart, the great figure of the piece, charac-

* Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 690.

teristic in his place, stood aloof and independent from the puny profligacy in his train!—but far from idle and inactive—turning a malignant eye on all mischief that awaited him!—the multiplied apparatus of temporising expedients and intimidating instruments! now cringing on his prey, and fawning on his vengeance! now quickening the limpid pace of craft, and forcing every stand that retiring nature can make in the heart! violating the attachments and the decorums of life! sacrificing every emotion of tenderness and honour! and flagitiously levelling all the distinctions of national characteristics! with a long catalogue of crimes and aggravations, beyond the reach of thought, for human malignity to perpetrate, or human vengeance to punish." *

The few words in the actual speech, upon which the foregoing superstructure of bombast was reared, are these:—"Oh! Justice, Faith! Policy! fly from this spot "—though your temple and sanctuary—for a moment, "and do not hear that human arrogancy has charged "you with such crimes; for it is not in the power of "human vengeance to punish for such crimes." †

To add to these instances of discrepancy between the two versions of this speech would be superfluous. Enough has been quoted to show how Sheridan actually spoke, and to demonstrate the untrustworthy character of the current version. With the following short and striking specimen of something worse than blundering, this examination may end. Referring to Captain Gordon, Sheridan is made to say, that it was difficult to imagine any man could tell a benefactor:—"The breath that I

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 121, 122.
† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 702.

now draw, next to Heaven, I owe to you; my existence is an emanation from your bounty; I am indebted to you beyond all possibility of return; and therefore my *gratitude* shall be your *destruction.*" *

He really remarked:—"If he was so deluded, he "may explain that delusion to your lordships; but till "that time I will not believe that Captain Gordon, who "said to the Begums, 'The welfare of your servant is "'entirely owing to your favour and benevolence,' "meant to say, 'And the gratitude of your servant "'shall be your destruction.'" †

The long and elaborate peroration which, in the current version, resembles the outpouring of an insane rhetorician, does not lack either sense or effect in the accurate report. The passage, though ridiculous in its spurious form, has often been praised. That it was attributed to Sheridan sufficed to make uncritical and credulous readers think it fraught with sublimity and beauty. Many an unhappy schoolboy has been told to admire and study the nonsense Sheridan never uttered, in order that he might learn the secret of Sheridan's power as an orator.

The accurate version of this speech, while differing in all essential points from the better-known one, is by no means a faultless composition. In it may be read the very words which drew forth from Burke the admiring comment:—"There, that is the true style; something between poetry and prose, and better than either;" and the criticism from Fox:—"Such a mixture was for the advantage of neither, as producing poetic prose, or, still worse, prosaic poetry." There is an

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 391.
† Shorthand Report, vol. i., p. 592.

artificiality about the more ambitious passages which makes them unpleasant reading, yet which may not have marred their effect on delivery. They are in Sheridan's peculiar style; the style which predominates alike in his comedies and his other speeches; the greatest artifice being displayed in the collocation of words, but the perfect art, which effaces the marks of the file, being often absent. With almost unrivalled skill, he could turn an epigram and barb a phrase with satire. This was his distinguishing gift, as that of Rochefoucauld was to write maxims. Had Rochefoucauld tried to rival Bossuet as a writer of funeral orations he would have failed as completely as Sheridan did when he strove to outdo Burke in figurative rhetoric, lavish imagery, and impassioned declamation.

Common sense and close reasoning, not vapid rhetoric and bad taste, predominate in this famous oration. In the current version there are but few quotations; whereas the correct report contains a series of apt and telling extracts from the evidence, arranged in the most skilful manner, connected and illustrated by appropriate remarks and comments. The purely rhetorical passages are interspersed, in order to vary the monotony of dry facts, and to render the whole at once more attractive and conclusive. Yet many of these passages could be omitted without injury to the rest, while they cannot be read with admiration apart from the context. Unless the entire speech be perused exactly as it was delivered, it is impossible to understand the extraordinary effect produced by the orator and excuse the extravagant eulogiums uttered by his admirers. No reader can deny that the speech itself was really worthy of the occasion and Sheridan's reputation;

that it may appropriately be ranked with the very highest efforts of the greatest among English orators.

Exactly to define, and clearly to understand, the position and merits of any orator, after having perused his speeches, is an almost hopeless task. The speeches may be masterpieces of composition; they may read well; indeed, in opposition to Fox, I maintain that a good speech must read well. Nevertheless, the speeches which, on perusal, appear to be of unrivalled excellence, may have fallen flat when delivered, failed in convincing, and excited more yawns than applause. Erskine could not listen with patience to the great speech of Burke on Conciliation with America, and, in common with many others, he left the House. The same speech, in its printed form, he read and re-read with unabated delight. Burke wanted one of the orator's most important qualifications. To speak well does not alone consist in uttering fine phrases. The personality of a really great speaker is so much greater an element than the mere literary cast of his utterances, that when the speech is printed half its spirit has departed. The dry bones are there, and constitute a useful study. Sayings, commonplace in themselves and unlikely to fix any reader's attention, may electrify an audience. There is no magic in these few words, "America, they tell me, has resisted—I rejoice to hear it;" yet when spoken by the elder Pitt in the House of Commons they produced a ferment; Grattan, who was present when they were uttered, pronounced them finer than anything in Demosthenes. A Budget speech by Mr. Gladstone or any one of Mr. Bright's or Mr. Disraeli's speeches is excellent reading; but it is the

effect they produced on delivery which has given to their authors oratorical renown.

With the subtle knowledge of an audience which is the orator's distinctive gift, Sheridan knew when to pause and when to proceed; how to dominate his hearers by appearing to yield to their caprice. He had an exquisite voice, a fascinating eye, perfect self-possession, imperturbable good humour, happy audacity in speaking bold and unwelcome truths, tempered by the breeding and knowledge of the man of the world. He was accounted so excellent as an orator because he was such a clever actor, playing to perfection a part of which he alone had the secret. To be applauded for his wit was his ambition; it was gratified to the full. Often he convulsed his hearers by an unpremeditated sally; more frequently he extorted their admiration by a pointed saying which he had laboriously prepared. Though he rehearsed his witticisms, yet he rehearsed them so carefully, and chose his opportunity for launching them so skilfully, that they had all the air of flowing spontaneously from his tongue, the inspired offspring of the moment. His hearers greeted them with rapturous applause. On his part, he spared no pains to uphold his reputation as a sayer of clever things, as the minter of phrases which became the current coin of conversation and debate. His disinclination to put a single dull and wholly natural character into one of his plays was not greater than to address a simple and wholly business-like speech to the House of Commons. Brilliancy of this kind is more suited, however, for the conventional world of the stage than for the arena of practical legislation.

V.

CHARACTER AND REPUTATION.

It is the general opinion that Sheridan's was a wasted life. He entered the world with everything against him; he overcame obstacles which would have daunted and thwarted other men; he did so much and rose so high that the fact of his not doing more or rising still higher has been considered discreditable to him. The failings of his latter days are regarded as slurs upon his memory. To disparage the successful who are not wholly blameless is a task most congenial to the duller section of mankind, and when such a career as Sheridan's can be made the text for insipid moralizing, the opportunity is readily embraced.

That Sheridan was irregular in his habits and overlavish in his expenditure cannot be denied, and can only be lamented. Those who suffered by either have the best right to complain; complaint resembles impertinence in those who have sustained no injury. His memory has been injured by injudicious apology. The Hon. Mrs. Norton, who, as his granddaughter, had a hereditary title to be proud of him, has advanced a plea in his defence which ought never to have been seriously mooted. She says that "Sheridan was drunk as his

companions were drunk, and with his drunken companions—with a drunken Prince Royal and the drunken Ministers of the Crown—but there can be little doubt that the more finely organised the brain, the more fatal the consequences of such swinish excitement." * A much better apology than this, if apology be necessary, is implied in Byron's line—

"That what to them seem'd Vice, might be but Woe."

The circumstance that he was latterly prone to over-indulgence in wine is one which may properly serve to point the moral of a temperance lecture, but which does not affect his reputation as a dramatist and an orator. In the case of Sheridan, as in that of Addison, near whose remains his own were laid, posterity is more benefited by the product of the frequent midnight labour than injured by the mistake of the occasional midnight debauch.

What distinguishes Sheridan and his works, and partially explains the character and peculiarities of both, is the Celtic cast of his mind and of his temperament. Though he left Ireland before he was twelve, and never revisited it, yet he was none the less imbued with the characteristics of his race. He had a love for his native land amounting to a passion. The interests of Ireland, he made one of his chief considerations in Parliament. Speaking in 1799, he said, "My country has claims upon me which I am not more proud to acknowledge than ready to liquidate to the full measure of my ability." On almost the last occasion he addressed the House of Commons he said, "Be just to Ireland as you value your own honour; be just to

* *Macmillan's Magazine*, vol. iii., p. 176.

Ireland as you value your own peace." In many of the incidents of his life are exhibited the impulsiveness of the warm-hearted and uncalculating Irishman rather than the cool circumspection and prevision of the more practical and reflecting Englishman. This inherited tendency, manifested from the episode of his marriage down to his final and unavailing struggle with financial embarrassment, imparted a tincture of romance to his career, rendering it a chequered scene of unprecedented success and dismal misfortune. He even took delight in exaggerating his natural bent, and indulged in conduct more suited to a boisterous schoolboy than a man who had reached years of discretion. The practical jokes from which Tickel and other friends were constant sufferers, and of which Madame de Genlis was once the victim, were due to a buoyancy of temperament which could not easily be repressed. He hoaxed Dr. Parr into supposing him to have mastered the Greek language. He made Charles Butler record in all seriousness that "his supreme ambition was to be thought the best possible manager of a theatre," and that his regret was not to have "devoted himself to the Muses. He used to say that he was designed for poetry. . . . What am I the better for the admiration of the Senate, for Mr. Fox, for Devonshire House? I have thrown myself away."* In his plays and speeches, "his deathless wit, which knew not what it was to intermit," his ambitious flights of oriental luxuriance where the sense is shrouded in metaphor, he was a type of that Celtic intellect which is so rich and unrestrained as to be always in extremes, whether distilling epigrams or

* Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. ii., p. 76.

multiplying imagery; which perceives almost intuitively the weak point in another, turning the slightest slip into provoking ridicule, yet is coupled with a strange incapacity for self-knowledge and self-control, and is frequently betrayed by impetuosity or headlessness into committing the very errors it is quick in detecting and most skilful in exposing. Some of the greatest extravagances in Mr. Puff's tragedy are not more ludicrous than certain passages which Sheridan added as ornaments to *Pizarro*.

Moore proves, by the irrefragable evidence of documents, that many of Sheridan's most striking passages of apparently spontaneous oratory, were carefully premeditated. His contemporaries were conscious of this. Sir Samuel Romilly informed a dinner party at Bentham's, that "nothing could be more marked than the differences between the parts of his speeches previously written out, and the extemporaneous parts. The audience could discover in a moment when he fell into the latter." * Notwithstanding this artificiality of diction, the passages themselves were keenly relished and loudly applauded. One of them which, whether prepared or not, was most telling, is preserved in the memorandum book of Lord Eldon:—"During the debate on the India Bill [Pitt's], at which period John Robinson was Secretary to the Treasury, Sheridan, on one evening, when Mr. Fox's majorities were decreasing, said, 'Mr. Speaker, this is not at all to be wondered at, when a member is employed to corrupt everybody in order to obtain votes.' Upon this there was a general outcry made by almost everybody in the House: 'Who is it? Name him! name him!' 'Sir,' said Sheridan

* Residence at the Court of London, by Mr. Rush, p. 290.

to the Speaker, 'I shall not name the person. It is an unpleasant and invidious thing to do so, and therefore I shall not name him. But don't suppose, sir, that I abstain because there is any difficulty in naming; I could do that, sir, as soon as you could say Jack Robinson.'" *

Sayings quite as pointed and happy occur in the passages which have been quoted from his speeches. A much longer list might easily be made. It is almost impossible, however, to determine how many of the good things commonly attributed to him were really his own. To those generally known may be added the following, which some of his contemporaries thought to be an excellent specimen of his ready wit. Madame d'Arblay writes that "Mrs. Cholmondeley was making much sport by wishing for an acrostic on her name. 'An acrostic on your name,' said Mr. Sheridan, 'would be a formidable task; it must be so long that I think it should be divided into cantos.'" †

Praises of his oratory and conduct in the House of Commons have been already cited from the utterances of his most famous contemporaries. A not unimportant addition to them is the opinion of Mr. Abbot, formed when he was Speaker at the beginning of the century, and afterwards known as Lord Colchester:— Sheridan was "Fluent in speech, shrewd in his conceptions, dexterous in argumentation, neat and even terse in his prepared speeches, witty often when his subject requires gravity, the most active and mischievous partisan of the Republican faction, playing off Fox as a constitutional opposer of the King's Ministers,

* Life of Lord Eldon, vol. i., p. 161.
† Diary of Madame d'Arblay, vol. i., p. 187.

and acting himself hand and heart with the most desperate Jacobins." *

More remarkable than the most memorable of his parliamentary triumphs was his appearance as advocate in his own cause before the Court of Chancery. In that court, rhetoric is of far less avail than argument. The greater, then, the success of one whose arguments were frequently subordinated to imagery. That his oratorical triumph in this uncongenial atmosphere was as extraordinary as it was complete, the testimony of Charles Butler places beyond all doubt :—"Perhaps Mr. Sheridan's most splendid exhibition was his speech in the Court of Chancery, at the hearing of the cause upon the bill filed against him by the trustees of Drury Lane Theatre. The court was crowded; Mr. Sheridan spoke during two hours, with amazing shrewdness of observation, force of argument, and splendour of eloquence ; and, as he spoke from strong feeling, he introduced little of the wit and prettyness with which his oratorical displays were generally filled. He was heard with great attention and interest; while his speech lasted, a pin might be heard to drop." †

During the thirty years that he had a seat in the House of Commons, he never made an enemy, nor did he ever abjure one of his political principles. To take an active part in debate, and to be unsparing in personality, was in his day almost certain to lead to a hostile encounter with sword or pistol. Lord George Germaine and Governor Johnstone, Lord Shelburne and Fullerton, Adam and Fox, Tierney and Pitt, Canning and Castlereagh, had all to fight duels in

* Diary of Lord Colchester, vol. i., p. 23.
† Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. ii., p. 87.

vindication of their honour; but Sheridan, during his parliamentary career, never had to send a challenge and never received one. Stronger testimony than this, to the suavity of his demeanour, it would be difficult to produce. Moreover, he preserved his political consistency amidst the greatest temptations, and remained faithful to the cause of freedom when many around him went over to the side of despotism. The path to wealth and place was open and smooth for him when, in the panic to which feeble-minded or timorous Whigs succumbed along with high-prerogative Tories, the Ministry of Pitt was recruited and reinforced from the ranks of the Opposition. Sheridan's desertion would have excited little surprise when made in company with Lord Portland, Lord Spencer, Lord Fitzwilliam, Burke, and Windham. He could easily have obtained a place in the Government, and he might without much difficulty have secured a peerage. To his immortal honour, he remained true to what he believed to be the cause of liberty, which was, in fact, the cause of justice. As a member of the small minority which rightly prided itself upon being the real constitutional party, he did a service to this country which no unprejudiced reader of our history can now recall without gratitude mingled with regret that it never received its due reward. If nothing in his career merits greater praise than his unselfish and consistent political conduct, nothing is more affecting than the keenness with which he felt his trial. Byron informs us what his feelings were:—"Once I saw Sheridan cry, after a splendid dinner. I had the honour of sitting next him. The occasion of his tears was some ob-

servation or other upon the sturdiness of the Whigs in resisting office and keeping to their principles. Sheridan turned round: 'Sir, it is easy for my Lord C., or Earl G., or Marquis B., or Lord H., with thousands upon thousands a year, some of it either presently derived or inherited in sinecure or acquisitions from the public money, to boast of their patriotism and keep aloof from temptation; but they do not know from what temptation those have kept aloof who had equal pride, at least equal talents, and not unequal passions, and nevertheless knew not in the course of their lives what it was to have a shilling of their own.' And in saying this he wept." He was not the first statesman, in a similar predicament, who had been forced to exercise patience without being able to live in comfort, because to some of his associates the salary of office was an immaterial consideration. Walpole records that the Duke of Portland pressed him "earnestly to encourage Mr. Conway to resign. I said I could not take upon me to advise him to give up all he had. He laughed, and said it could not be for long; everything came round in this country. I replied, 'Your lordship, with twenty thousand pounds a year, talks very much at your ease; but Mr. Conway would have nothing in the world, and would not go into Opposition to recover his fortune.'" * It is infinitely to Sheridan's credit that he consistently continued in Opposition notwithstanding the narrowness of his circumstances. Lynx-eyed enemies and envious friends were ever on the watch to detect him tripping. He felt this so acutely that,

* Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. ii., p. 383.

living on terms of intimacy with Addington when he was Premier, and dining with him at his house in Richmond Park, he told the Minister one evening: "My visits to you may possibly be misconstrued by my friends; but I hope you know, Mr. Addington, that I have an unpurchaseable mind." * Cynical critics, commenting on this, might remark that, just as it has been said the woman who protests she never flirts, is flirting, so Sheridan, protesting that he could not be bought, was bidding for an offer. But the conclusive answer is that he never sold himself, and he stands before the tribunal of history with perfectly clean hands.

To have avoided Parliamentary brawls which ended in duels; to have preserved his consistency amidst exceptional and under almost superhuman difficulties, was to distinguish himself in no common manner; but Sheridan did what was more praiseworthy still. With the advocacy of nearly every great and wise measure during thirty years he associated his name. He advocated unconditional peace with America, when an obstinate Ministry contended for unconditional submission. He warmly supported Fox's India Bill, the best measure devised in the last century for the government of India. His whole talents were displayed in hindering any cruelty and tyranny exercised over Hindoos being condoned by the people or the Parliament of this country. When Pitt, in his reforming days, was ardently desiring to improve the representation of the people in Parliament, Sheridan was as hearty in supporting him as he afterwards was in opposition to Pitt's measures

* Life of Lord Sidmouth, vol. ii., p. 105.

designed to hamper individual freedom. He gave his voice and vote for non-interference with France when she was in the throes of emancipation after centuries of bondage, and when to leave her to work out her own destiny would have been to save Europe from a reaction of which Bonaparte was the incarnation and universal conquest the goal. No narrow interpretation of party claims hindered him from aiding the Ministry at the menacing crisis of the mutiny at the Nore, and using all his influence to avert a dreaded catastrophe. When Bonaparte showed himself the systematic enemy of every independent nationality in Europe, Sheridan was as ready to smite him with the sword as he had been at an earlier time to remain in amity with him. The emancipation which the Roman Catholics of Ireland claimed as a boon, Sheridan was anxious to grant as a measure of simple justice. Not only was he ready to suppress the slave-trade, but he avowed his longing to abolish slavery also. On the other hand, it must be noted with regret, that, as regards leading questions of commercial intercourse, which in essence are questions of universal well-being, Sheridan, in common with men accounted wise among his contemporaries, adopted and urged the narrow and short-sighted view of a selfish and foolish policy of restriction. He denounced the sagacious and statesman-like proposals of Pitt for removing artificial and legislative impediments to trade between Great Britain and Ireland, and for concluding a commercial treaty with France. This, however, was but the fruit of an ignorance rooted in a mistaken patriotism which, confounding national selfishness with national glory, produced incalculable evil in his day, and

is still working much mischief in our time, by hindering many persons, calling themselves statesmen and political economists, in the Old and the New World, from recognizing the paramount value to all mankind of the free interchange of natural products.

Take him for all in all, as wit and orator, dramatist and politician, Sheridan was at once a luminary and leader of his age. His career, which is as much a romance as that of any personage in fiction, has but one parallel in our history, the career of the attorney's clerk of Hebrew race who has risen to be Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Both Sheridan and Mr. Disraeli first made their mark as men of extraordinary wit; both failed in their first attempt to make the House of Commons accept them at their own valuation, and both occupy places in the first rank among parliamentary orators. The skill of both in coining happy phrases and in elaborating epigrams can only be equalled by their fondness for glitter often false, and for display often tawdry and ill-timed. The author of the picture of Bonaparte surrounding himself with a fence composed of sceptres tipped with crowns, and employing kings as his sentinels, has never had so successful a competitor in the same line as the orator who planted in imagination the banner of St. George on the mountains of "Rasselas."

Sheridan's dramatic laurels will not wither till the English tongue ceases to be the language of the stage. His parliamentary fame is as certain of immortality. A quotation from no writer or orator of a bygone age is so sure of gratifying the House of Commons as one from his plays or speeches. Mr. Bright once charmed his hearers with what he

called the beautiful language of Sheridan, picturing the ideal of repose when "Content sits basking on the cheek of toil," and, though few were aware that the quotation was made from *Pizarro*, yet all were ready to applaud the words of the man whose memory is a cherished tradition of the House. Lamenting the death of Cobden, Mr. Disraeli said, in his finest vein: "There are some members of Parliament who, though not present in the body, are still members of this House: independent of dissolutions, of the caprice of constituencies, even of the course of time."* In common with "the wondrous three"—Burke, Pitt, and Fox—Sheridan is one of the immortals ruling "our spirits from their urns."

* Parliamentary Debates, vol. 188, p. 667.

CHARLES JAMES FOX.

In 1627, the year when the House of Commons presented a Petition of Right to Charles the First, and when they were informed that he was "accountable to God only for his actions," a boy was born who lived to become a useful servant of the House of Stuart, and the forefather of a great English statesman. He was the son of a yeoman residing at Farley, in Wiltshire, and was named Stephen Fox. There, he received what was then considered to be a thoroughly liberal education. He learned to read, write, cipher, and keep accounts. His biographer relates that, at the age of fifteen, "he, for the beauty of his person, and towardliness of his disposition, was recommended to some employment or other under the great Earl of Northumberland."* Transferring his services, after a time, to Lord Percy, the Earl's brother, he acted as deputy to the latter at the Ordnance Board, and, in that capacity, was present with the royalist army at the battle of Worcester. His conduct being as judicious and conciliatory as his master's was rude and irritating, he was much liked, and attracted the favourable notice of Charles the Second, King of Scotland.

Fleeing to France along with this sovereign, who had been signally defeated in his attempt to restore monarchy in England, Stephen Fox first served him in

* Memoirs of the Life of Sir Stephen Fox, p. 5.

a menial capacity, and then acted as Keeper of his Privy Purse. After the unfortunate and lamented death of Cromwell, he was sent by his master on a special mission to General Monk. When the English people in a paroxysm of folly permitted the monarchy to be re-established for the benefit of the Stuarts, and unconditionally accepted as their lawful ruler the eldest son of the King they had dethroned and beheaded, the conspicuous betrayers of the Commonwealth received the wages of their iniquity, while the adherents to the deposed dynasty were ostentatiously rewarded for their fidelity. General Monk, whose treachery was fraught with innumerable woes to this country, received an estate and a large pension to glut his avarice, and all the titles in the peerage, from that of a Baron to a Duke, to gratify his ambition. The subordinate, yet not dishonourable, service of Stephen Fox was recompensed with the lucrative offices of Clerk of the Green Cloth and Paymaster of the Forces, and, at a later period, with the titular dignity of Knighthood. Clarendon commended him for uprightness, and Grammont commemorated him for his riches. A portion of his wealth was expended to further a laudable public object. He had seen, with patriotic shame and regret, common soldiers begging their daily bread from door to door in their old age. Considering this painful spectacle dishonouring to the nation, he founded Chelsea Hospital as an asylum for these veterans in the days of their decrepitude. Out of his own pocket, he contributed £13,000 to the erection of this home for old soldiers.

Sir Stephen Fox succeeded the Earl of Rochester as a Commissioner of the Treasury; he filled that office

for twenty-two years and during three reigns. He long represented Salisbury in Parliament. He was twice elected member for the City of Westminster, the first time in 1678 and the second in 1695. The latter election was the memorable one when the brilliant Charles Montague, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Sir Stephen Fox, a Commissioner of the Treasury, supported the Government of William the Third, in opposition to the Jacobite party, represented by Sir William Clarges, and when the triumphant return of the ministerial candidates was an emphatic demonstration in favour of the King elected by the nation.

Though a trusty public servant in the reigns of William the Third and Queen Anne, yet Sir Stephen Fox retained to the last day of his life an affectionate regard for the House of Stuart. On every anniversary of the execution of Charles the First, he draped the rooms of his house with black, fasted, and made his household do likewise, from sunrise to sunset. When seventy-seven, he took as a second wife Miss Hope, the daughter of a clergyman who, it is said, had been "so assiduous in reading books of devotion and history to him, that he was so taken with her" as to make an offer of his hand. Notwithstanding his great age, he had four children by this marriage, and he survived it twelve years. He died in 1716, aged eighty-nine.

His second son by his second wife was born in 1705, and named Henry. When Henry Fox came of age he had an ample fortune. But riotous living soon impoverishing him, he fled from his creditors to the Continent. Returning home after a lengthened sojourn abroad, he entered Parliament in 1735 as member for Hindon. He attached himself to Sir Robert Walpole, then in the fulness of his power;

found favour in his eyes, and obtained advancement at his hand. Henry Fox stood forth, in defence of his patron, as the critic and opponent of Pitt. A ready and bold speaker, he commanded attention without acquiring fame. His forte was not eloquence, but tact in bribing the House. He was an adept in all the low arts of corruption. No one could more skilfully gain over an unprincipled opponent by insinuating a bank-note into his hand, or the promise of promotion in his ear. He had a vaulting ambition, no inconvenient scruples, and an insatiable thirst for money. Lord Chesterfield who, though a profligate at heart and a voluptuary in practice, was too cautious and worldly-wise not to bow the head to decency in public, was amazed at Henry Fox's cynical disregard for the conventional proprieties of life, and characterized him "as having no fixed principles of religion or morality, and as too unwary in ridiculing and exposing them." The people hated him with intense bitterness. At one time, he was accused with more than rhetorical exaggeration of being the "defaulter of unaccounted millions." Conscious of his extreme unpopularity, he refers to himself, when writing to George Selwyn, in 1767, as universally despised, adding "I am humbled, and shall endeavour to conform to my fate." * The opinion of the public was manifested in lampoons and satires. Two epigrams, of no merit as compositions, clearly exhibit the prevailing feeling. When the freedom of the City was presented to Pitt in a gold box, it was written—

> "The two great rivals London might content,
> If what he values most to each she sent;

* George Selwyn and his Contemporaries, vol. ii., p. 209.

Ill was the freedom coupled with the box,
Give Pitt the freedom and the gold to Fox." *

Again, when the nation was mourning the death of Wolfe in the arms of victory, the opportunity was thought a good one for pointing a sarcasm against Henry Fox :—

" All conqu'ring cruel death, more hard than rocks,
Thou should'st have spared the *Wolfe* and took the *Fox*." †

He had smarted under the imputation of being a plebeian, after having won the heart, and clandestinely secured the hand of the eldest daughter of the second Duke of Richmond. Like the offspring of other royal bastards who had been ennobled, the Richmond family were excessively proud of their rank. They thought an alliance degrading with a mere commoner. Henry Fox finally became a nobleman. Having begun his political life in the House of Commons as the pupil of Sir Robert Walpole, he ended it as the humble instrument of the Earl of Bute; by his services to the latter, he acquired fresh infamy and a peerage. The title of Baron Holland did not suffice him; his heart being set upon an earldom. Though he died without having reached the goal of his wishes, yet this was not due to any reluctance to engage in intrigues, and to demean himself by abject supplications to the Sovereign. The solace of his old age was his third son Charles, whom he believed destined to be an honour to his family. To have been the father of Charles James Fox constitutes the best title of the first Lord Holland to the favourable remembrance of posterity.

* Horace Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's Edition, vol. iii. p. 74.
† New Foundling Hospital for Wit, vol. v., p. 188.

I.

EARLY LIFE OF FOX.

On the 24th of January, 1749, Charles James Fox was born in Conduit Street, in the city of Westminster. While his grandfather, in the male line, was the attached servant of Charles the Second, his great-great-grandmother, in the female line, was that monarch's favourite French mistress, the Duchess of Portsmouth. In personal appearance, he bore a striking resemblance to his royal progenitor. Some men might have been proud to think that they had in their veins the blood of Henry the Fourth of France and Charles the Second of England; but no such miserable vanity was ever laid to Fox's charge by his worst and most virulent enemies. He once told the House of Commons that "the people of England had, in his opinion, committed a worse offence by the unconstitutional restoration of that monarch, than even by the death of Charles the First." On another occasion, referring to the reign of Charles the Second, he asked: "Was there any one who looked to the history of those times, to an unprincipled policy of the Court, and the open profligacy of public measures, who did not consider it as a blemish on the English character, and a reproach to the spirit of our ancestors, that the reign of that monarch was suffered to be pro-

tracted till the period of his natural life?"* Indeed, for but one King had he a greater contempt than for Charles the Second.

As a child, he was remarkable for precocity; unlike precocious children in general, he was neither cut off young, nor did he degenerate into a dull man. His father, who was immoderately fond and proud of his boy, indulged him in every way. In this he resembled Sir Robert Walpole, of whom his son, Horace, writes, "The infinite good nature of my father never thwarted any of his children." But excessive parental tenderness is hardly less injurious than over-severity. It is greatly to the credit of young Charles Fox that he was not completely spoiled by his father's exceeding fondness. Overhearing his mother remark to his father,—"Charles is dreadfully passionate, what shall we do with him?" and the reply, "Oh, never mind, he is a very sensible little fellow, and will learn to cure himself," he resolved to curb his temper, and succeeded so well in bringing it under control as to be noted in after-life for placidity of disposition and for extraordinary self-command under the strongest provocation.

Though Henry Fox's over-indulgence of his children was a fault, yet he partially atoned for it by rigid adherence to his word, teaching them by example the sacredness of a pledge. Once, having promised Charles that "he should be present when a garden wall was to be flung down, and having forgotten it, the wall was built up again, that he might perform his promise."† Another instance of this fidelity to his

* Fox's Speeches, vol. vi., pp. 55, 79.

† Manuscript Reminiscences of Sir G. Colebrooke, quoted in Memorials of Fox, vol. i., p. 7.

word appears in an extract from a letter written at Holland House to Lady Holland, in the country:—"Whenever you come, do but let me know the day and hour when you will be at Salthill, and Farmen and Charles shall meet you there. I promised Charles he should see his brother, and he won't be put off." Much of his teaching, however, was utterly bad. He impressed on his favourite son the maxim—"Never do to-day what you can possibly put off till to-morrow, nor ever do, yourself, what you can get any one else to do for you." *

His father having determined to send him to Eton as soon as he was nine years old, gave him the option, when he was eight, of staying at home or of spending the interval at a school kept by Pampelonne, a French refugee, at Wandsworth. He elected to go to school. In the autumn of 1768, he went to Eton. His health was delicate; that it occasioned some anxiety to his father appears in the following extract from a letter sent by the latter to his mother:—"Whenever you think London or Holland House better for Charles than Eton, be assured I shall like it. There is no comparison to be made between health and learning: besides that, I am sure enough of him for the latter; I wish to God I was so of the former." His father's conviction that he would learn enough may have been formed from the reports of his tutor, the Rev. Dr. Francis, but was not justified by the boy's assiduity at his studies. He was often summoned home from school to take part in some amusement or to witness some ceremony. He was present at the coronation of George the Third.

* Moore's Life of Sheridan, vol. i., p. 113.

Meeting with an accident at this time, his father writes: "The article (in the newspapers) of Charles's mishap has brought several messages. The boy is a great deal better beloved than his father is."

When fourteen, he accompanied his parents on a visit to the Continent. They spent four months partly at Paris and at Spa. His foolish and blameworthy father encouraged him to amuse himself in every way, whether vicious or not, and laughed at his scruples when he hesitated to indulge in profligacy. At Spa, he initiated him into the mysteries of the gaming-table, encouraged him to play, and gave him several gold pieces for the purpose every evening. Thus he acquired in early youth the taste for an amusement which was the passion of his manhood and the subject of remorse in his riper years. At his own request, he returned to Eton. His schoolfellows jeered at the varnish of foreign manners he had acquired. A flogging administered by the head master, Dr. Barnard, soon emphatically reminded him that he was a schoolboy still.

The excitement relative to the *North Briton* being now at its height, he was taken by his father to listen to the debates in Parliament. He was in the gallery of the House of Commons when a resolution was moved and carried to the effect that No. 45 was "a false, scandalous, and seditious libel." His father impressed upon him the heinousness of the conduct of Wilkes and the propriety of his punishment; taught him to think Lord Bute, the favourite of the King, a much greater man than Pitt, the idol of the people, and had the satisfaction of finding this opinion embodied in some French verses which, though certainly

execrable, were yet perfectly in keeping with their subject.

Leaving Eton in 1764, he went to Oxford, and was entered at Hertford College, which then had a high reputation, owing to the extraordinary merit and popularity of Dr. Newcome, afterwards Lord Primate of Ireland. The college is now extinct: Magdalen Hall stands on its site. In a letter to Mr. Macartney, he says, "I like Oxford well enough. I read there a great deal, and am very fond of mathematics." A year later, he again tells the same correspondent that he reads much at Oxford, that he greatly likes mathematics, adding the remark which has the look of a paradox, "I believe they are useful, and I am sure they are entertaining, which is alone enough to recommend them to me." He adds, in the same letter, "If there were any way of sending you pamphlets I would send you a new poem, called the 'Traveller,' which appears to have a great deal of merit."

At Easter, 1765, he revisited Paris. Before going thither, he informed Dr. Newcome of his intention, and received the following reply, which he treasured as a proof that he had been a diligent student during his University career:—"You judged rightly in thinking I should be much surprised by the information you were so obliging to give me. But upon reflection I think that you have done well to change the scene in such a manner, and I feel myself inclined to envy you the power of doing it. Application like yours requires some intermission, and you are the only person with whom I have ever had connection to whom I could say this. I expect that you

will return with much keenness for Greek and for lines and angles. As to trigonometry, it is a matter of entire indifference to the other geometricians of the College (who will probably continue some time here) whether they proceed to the other branches of mathematics immediately or wait a term or two longer. You need not, therefore, interrupt your amusements by severe studies; for it is wholly unnecessary to take a step onward without you, and therefore we shall stop until we have the pleasure of your company. All your acquaintances here which I know are well, but not much happier for your absence."*

After two months' stay in Paris, he returned to the University, and sedulously prosecuted his studies. The greater part of an entire vacation, he passed there along with his friend Dickson, afterwards Bishop of Down. They both worked hard, employing their hours of recreation in perusing the works of all the early English dramatic poets. It is alleged that Fox read with care every play written and published prior to the Restoration. In those days the undergraduates who wished to amuse themselves had but little option between hard drinking and light reading; they had not the choice of their successors between hard reading and rowing. Yet, though the relaxation which, at the present day, takes the form of athletic sports was unknown to Fox and his friend, they did not lapse into mere book-worms, or tax their brains till they were unable to use their legs. On the contrary, both were excellent and frequent walkers; and, to a late period in his life, Fox was renowned for his pedestrian powers. On one occasion,

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 22.

not having money wherewith to pay for a conveyance, they walked from Oxford to London, a distance of fifty-six miles.

While boating and cricket had then no recognised place in the University curriculum, neither had the undergraduates of his day, whose ambition it was to speak in public, any opportunity for training themselves in debating societies, and acquiring the sing-song declamation which passes current for oratory in the mimic parliament of the "Union." Fox, however, had the advantage of access to the gallery of either House of Parliament when any topic of public interest was the subject of debate. He was present at the memorable discussion in the House of Lords, when, at the instance of the first Rockingham Administration, the ridiculous and irritating Stamp Act was repealed, and he pronounced the speech of the Duke of Grafton the best among those he heard. He had made the acquaintance of Edmund Burke, from whom he imbibed much political wisdom, yet the early teaching of his father still caused him to despise the party of which he afterwards became the leader and the soul. Hence it was that, writing to Sir George Macartney, he informs him the Rockingham "Ministry goes on just as it did, everybody laughing at them and holding them cheap; but, according to the fashionable phrase, doing justice to their good *intentions*." *

His father's fondness for him continued to increase, while his admiration kept pace with his affection. In a letter to Sir George Macartney, he says, "Charles is above measure kind and attentive to me. He has a good

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 26.

heart, and is more to be admired for that than for his head, which you know is no bad one. I am very happy in my family, and that may well atone for what I have to complain of in the article of friends." This excessive partiality for his third son was a constant subject of remonstrance on the part of Lady Holland. Her sister, the Duchess of Leinster, who was present on these occasions, has preserved the following statement made by the mother to the father :—" I have been this morning with Lady Hester Pitt (Lady Chatham), and there is little William Pitt, not eight years old, and really the cleverest child I ever saw, and brought up so strictly and so proper in his behaviour that, mark my words, that little boy will be a thorn in Charles's side as long as he lives." Seldom has a maternal prediction been so completely verified by the result.

He left the University in 1766, after taking his degree, and spent the two following years on the Continent. He travelled through France and Italy, sometimes in the company of his parents, sometimes in that of his friends Lord Carlisle, Lord Fitzwilliam, and Mr. Uvedale Price. Along with Mr. Price he paid a visit to Voltaire at Ferney, the latter saying, in reply to a request, that the name of Fox was a sufficient introduction; that he would gladly see him, though he hardly received any visitors, but that they came to bury him. The interview was very cordial; at parting, Voltaire gave his visitors a list of his writings, which he recommended as being well adapted for enlarging their minds and for freeing them from religious prejudices. Fox's passion at this period was for reading Italian poetry and versifying in French; he

sent French verses to his friend Fitzpatrick, and the following advice relative to Italian :—"Learn Italian as fast as you can, if it be only to read Ariosto. There is more good poetry in Italian than in all other languages that I understand put together. In prose, too, it is a very fine language." He was also fond of amateur acting, a taste which remained keen for many years, and of fine clothes, a taste which was soon succeeded by indifference and inattention to dress. Rogers used to relate "that Fox, when a very young man, was a prodigious dandy, wearing a little odd French hat, shoes with red heels, &c. He and Lord Carlisle once travelled from Paris to Lyons for the express purpose of buying waistcoats; and during the whole journey they talked of nothing else." *

While absent from England, he was returned for the pocket borough of Midhurst, through arrangements made by his father at the general election of 1768. He took his seat and spoke before he was twenty. His first appearance as a speaker was on a point of order. Supporting the expulsion of Wilkes, he delivered what is generally considered as his maiden speech, on the 14th of April, 1769, and favourably impressed his audience. His third speech, which was in support of seating Colonel Luttrel for Middlesex, produced a stronger effect. His gratified father thus refers to the second of these speeches in a letter to Mr. Campbell of Cawdor :—"I am told few in Parliament ever spoke better than Charles did on Tuesday —off-hand—with rapidity, with spirit, and such knowledge of what he was talking of as surprised every-

* Dyce's Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers, p. 73.

body in so young a man. If you think this vanity, I am sure you will forgive it." Of the last speech, Sir Richard Heron writes as follows to Sir Charles Bunbury:—"Mr. Charles Fox, who I suppose was your schoolfellow, and who is but twenty, made a great figure in the debate last night upon the petition of the Middlesex freeholders. He spoke with great spirit, in very parliamentary language, and entered very deeply into the question on constitutional principles." Horace Walpole writes, "Charles Fox, not yet twenty-one, answered Burke with great quickness and parts, but with confidence equally premature." His father expresses his joy in these words:—"I am told (and I willingly believe it) Charles Fox spoke extremely well. It was all off-hand, all argumentative, in reply to Mr. Burke and Mr. Wedderburn, and excessively well indeed. I hear it spoken of by everybody as a most extraordinary thing, and I am, you see, not a little pleased with it." *

Although these speeches gave Fox an immediate reputation as an orator, yet they became testimonies against him in after-life. His early conduct was as injudicious as it was violent. Thus, his first great success was a blunder. The excuse made for him was that he merely acted in accordance with his father's wishes and advice; an excuse which does more honour to him as a son than a politician. Both his brother and he offended the city patriots so highly by boisterous opposition to Wilkes, as to furnish a plausible pretext for reprisals in the form of demands for the impeachment of Lord Holland. The ability Charles Fox displayed, had an early recognition from

* Memorials, vol i., pp. 52, 53, 54.

the Administration of which Lord North was the head. In February, 1770, a few weeks after he had attained his majority, he was appointed a Lord of the Admiralty.

The Administration of Lord North was the sixth which had been formed since the accession of George the Third. The Duke of Newcastle, the Earl of Bute, George Grenville, Lord Rockingham, the Duke of Grafton, had in turn filled the office of Prime Minister, and each of them had resigned, owing either to the intrigues of the King or to dissensions among their followers. George the Third had vainly called upon the Duke of Grafton to stand by him, and continue in office. That peer, though he had not exhausted his youthful liking for dissipation before he undertook to govern the country, and though he openly preferred the society of his mistress and the pleasures of Newmarket to the routine of Cabinet councils, was yet a man after his Majesty's own heart, inasmuch as he had betrayed his friend Wilkes, and had never shown any scruples about the monarch exercising personal control over the Ministry. But, when quailing before the tumults raised by the high-handed action of the majority in the case of Wilkes, and when dreading the effects of Lord Chatham's denunciations of those who had subverted our representative system by seating in the House of Commons the nominee of a minority of the electors, the Duke of Grafton resigned his office, the King considered that the Duke had pusillanimously and basely deserted him in the hour of need. Though he could pardon the Duke's vices, yet he never forgave the Duke's resignation. To Lord North, he was grateful for accepting the office of First Lord of

the Treasury at a moment of great anxiety and difficulty, and this gratitude deepened into affection when he found in the new head of his Government a Minister who was not less skilful in managing Parliament than obsequious and successful in giving effect to his commands.

As a Junior Lord of the Admiralty, Fox neither thought himself bound to give an unwavering support to the Government, nor to refrain from indulging in the fashionable amusements of society. He was noted for his addiction to play. Along with some other young men, belonging, like himself, to the set formed of those who, in the slang of that day, were called maccaronis, and who, in the slang of our day, would be called swells, he founded a club at Almack's where the stakes were rouleaus of £50 each, and where as much as £10,000 were on the table at one time. "Nor were the manners of the gamesters, or even their dresses for play, undeserving notice. They began by pulling off their embroidered clothes and put on frieze greatcoats, or turned their coats inside outwards for luck. They put on pieces of leather (such as worn by footmen when they clean the knives) to save their laced ruffles; and to guard their eyes from the light, and to prevent tumbling their hair, wore high-crowned straw hats with broad brims, and adorned with flowers and ribbons; masks to conceal their emotions when they played at Quinze. Each gamester had a small neat stand by him with a large rim, to hold their tea, or a wooden bowl with an edge of ormolu, to hold their rouleaus. They borrowed great sums of Jews at exorbitant premiums. Charles Fox called his outward room, where those Jews waited

till he rose, the *Jerusalem Chamber.*" * He had a theory that money was a commodity, and that, like any commodity, it could always be procured, if a sufficient price were paid. In carrying this theory into practice, he found that the price he had to pay made him a beggar, and that money might be bought too dear.

After being a Lord of the Admiralty for two years, he sent the following note to Lord North :—"You have grossly insulted me, and I will resent it. I am just now going to set out for St. James's, to resign my seat at the Admiralty Board to the King." † The reason for this, as he told Lord Ossory, was very complicated, the chief cause being misunderstandings with Lord North, and a determination on his part to oppose the Royal Marriage Bill, then pending. He left the Ministry with no increase in reputation, and without any desire to enter the ranks of the Opposition. The Royal Marriage Bill was a measure originating with the King, and devised to prevent such occurrences as the marriages of the Duke of Cumberland with Mrs. Horton, and the Duke of Gloucester with Lady Waldegrave. Mr. Nicholls records that, when the Bill was introduced, it was suggested that the title should be "An Act to encourage Fornication and Adultery in the Descendants of George the Second." ‡ It may be doubted whether these descendants required any encouragement to practise their favourite vices ; yet this particular measure was unquestionably framed with a view to

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. i., p. 7.
† Recollections of Fox, by B. C. Walpole, p. 29.
‡ Recollections and Reflections of John Nicholls, M.P., vol. i., p. 34.

render marriage a greater offence than adultery.* Writing to Lord North, the King says:—"I do expect every nerve to be strained to carry the Bill through both Houses with a becoming firmness, for it is not a question that immediately relates to Administration, but personally to myself; therefore I have a right to expect a hearty support from every one in my service, and shall remember defaulters." † George the Third kept his word in this instance, as he did in every other when he cherished resentment; he never forgave Fox's denunciation of a scheme for converting the royal family into a royal caste. According to Walpole, "never was an Act passed *against* which so much and *for* which so little was said."

As an independent member, Fox introduced a Bill of his own to amend the Marriage Act of Lord Harwicke. The object of this measure was to remove barriers with which, in the interests of the nobility, the ceremony of marriage had been encompassed. According to Walpole, who went to the House on purpose to hear him, "he introduced it with ease, grace, and clearness, and without the prepared or elegant formality of a young speaker." Lord North opposed leave being granted, and was supported by Burke, who made "a long and fine oration." "Charles Fox, who had been running about the House talking to different persons and scarce listening to Burke, rose with amazing spirit and memory, answered both Lord North and Burke, ridiculed the arguments of

* When the Duke of Cumberland informed the King of his marriage with Mrs. Horton, the latter exclaimed, "You fool, you blockhead, you villain, you had better have debauched all the unmarried girls in England—you had better have committed adultery with all the married women."—Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. i., p. 119.

† Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i., p. 91.

the former and confuted those of the latter with a shrewdness that, from its multiplicity of reasons, as much exceeded his father in embracing all the arguments of his antagonists, as he did in his manner and delivery. Lord Holland was always confused before he could clear up the point, fluttered and hesitated, wanted diction, and laboured only one forcible conclusion. Charles Fox had great facility of delivery; his words flowed rapidly, but he had nothing of Burke's variety of language or correctness, nor his method, yet his arguments were far more shrewd." * By a majority of one, Fox carried this motion in opposition to the Ministry; but the ministerial majority afterwards rallied and threw out the Bill. He again became reconciled to Lord North. After having been a year out of office, he re-entered the Administration as a Junior Lord of the Treasury.

He was a regular frequenter of Newmarket, as well as an habitual gamester. At horse-racing he often won large sums; at play he invariably lost larger; the result being that his debts swelled rapidly. To clear him of liabilities which were growing intolerable, his father advanced £40,000. At this time he became the dupe of an adventuress who was known as the Hon. Mrs. Grieve. She had traded on human credulity by advertising herself as a "sensible woman," from whom advice on all emergencies could be obtained for half-a-guinea, resembling in her professions, as she probably did in her practices, Dame Ursula Suddlechop in the *Fortunes of Nigel*. By bribing Lord North's porter she was admitted into his house while her carriage waited at the door, and thus it was supposed that

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. i., p. 84.

she had access to the Minister, and that there was some reason for her statement that she was the cousin of the Duke of Grafton and Lord North. Mrs. Grieve informed Fox that a Miss Phipps, a West Indian heiress of great wealth, who had arrived in London, was in love with him, and ready to become his wife. It was even said that, being told Miss Phipps disliked a dark-haired man, he consented to have his hair and eyebrows powdered white. The heiress was a myth. Mrs. Grieve had eventually ample leisure in prison to repent her success in obtaining money under false pretences.

Fox's unwillingness to submit implicitly to Lord North's leadership was the origin of a difference which ended in a political separation. An article appeared in the *Public Advertiser*, in which the Speaker was rebuked for partiality. The House resenting this as a breach of privilege, Woodfall, the printer, was summoned to appear at the bar, where he disavowed personal responsibility, and stated that Parson Horne had written the obnoxious paragraph. The general feeling was that Woodfall's punishment should be nominal only; but to this Fox objected, and moved that he be sent to Newgate. Hesitating to involve the Commons in a quarrel with the magistrates of the City, on account of the humiliation they had undergone three years previously in the case of the printers whom Wilkes had instigated to defy the orders of the Speaker, Lord North suggested that Woodfall, if imprisoned at all, should be sent to the Gate-House; but avowed that he preferred the milder punishment of committal to the custody of the Serjeant-at-Arms. Refusing to modify his motion

in any particular, Fox pressed it to a division in which Lord North voted with him, and the Ministry was defeated by 152 to 68. This result excited the ire of the King, who wrote to Lord North, "I am greatly incensed at the presumption of Charles Fox in obliging you to vote with him that night, but approve much of your making your friends vote in the majority; indeed, that young man has so thoroughly cast off every principle of common honour and honesty that he must become as contemptible as he is odious; and I hope you will let him know you are not insensible of his conduct towards you." *

When Parson Horne did appear, and, by his skilful defence and cutting retorts, embarrassed the Ministry not a little, Fox contended that his advice had been wise and prudent, and warned the House against disregarding it on a similar occasion. The displeasure of the Minister was manifested in the dismissal of Fox, which was announced in the following curt note:—"Sir, his Majesty has thought proper to order a new commission of the Treasury to be made out, in which I do not see your name." Thus was finally severed Fox's connection with an Administration presided over by a Minister of extreme Tory sentiments; a Minister who thought it an honour and a duty to do the King's bidding, and whose weak subserviency to his sovereign cost the country a hundred millions of money, thirteen Provinces in America, and thousands of precious lives.

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. i., p. 170.

II.

OPPOSITION TO THE AMERICAN WAR.

THE political career of Fox as a Liberal dates from the year 1774. He was then twenty-five years old, had made a name in Parliament as a speaker, had sided with the Government of the day, and held office in it without identifying himself with the Ministerial party, one half of which was composed of so-called King's friends, the other half of avowed Tories, the whole constituting a combination for the elevation of the royal prerogative and the diminution of popular rights. The course he followed was chosen in accordance with the teaching and the views of his father, to whose personal predilections and political prejudices he displayed a submission which was truly filial, but not at all statesmanlike. It is not the duty of a young politician to think as his father did before him. As a natural consequence of espousing without reserve the side of which Lord Holland last approved, Fox displayed all the imprudent zeal and vehemence of the blind partisan who votes without reflection, and argues only to annoy opponents. To such an extreme did he go at the beginning of his parliamentary career as to make the following avowal, in a letter to George Selwyn, written when he was a Lord of the Admiralty:—"I am reading Clarendon, but scarcely get on faster than you did with your Charles the Fifth. I think the style bad, and that he has a great deal of the old woman

in his way of thinking, but hate the opposite party so much that it gives one a kind of partiality for him." * Such hatred as this was palpably factitious, and had unquestionably been adopted at second-hand.

However, in 1774, any reluctance he might have felt in opposing the party with which he had acted at his father's instigation was entirely removed by the deaths, in that year, of both his parents. His elder brother Stephen did not long survive them, so that he had no longer to regulate his political course out of consideration for those whom he warmly loved, and whose approbation he highly valued. Even had his father lived to direct or persuade him, it is unlikely that the conduct of Fox on the relations between this country and the colonies would have been less hostile to the policy and measures of the Court. Lord Holland had declared himself averse to treating the colonies with harshness. When an armed contest between them and the parent State appeared imminent he wrote to Mr. Ellis as follows:—"I am more sorry a good deal for the rebellion of the colonies. But I should date it from the passing of the Stamp Act, not the repeal of it." Before his father's death, Fox had intimated that he reserved to himself entire freedom of action concerning the Bill for removing the Custom House from Boston. The introduction of this measure was the first step taken in the American war. He voted with the Rockingham party for the repeal of the tea duty, the imposition of which was the immediate source of bitterness and strife.

* George Selwyn and his Contemporaries, vol. iii., p. 11.

At the beginning of 1774, Franklin had been grossly insulted by Wedderburn, the Solicitor-General, amid the applause of the Privy Council, before which the former had appeared as a petitioner on behalf of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Bay, and the latter as counsel for the Crown. For an error in judgment, which might have been pardoned, Franklin was dismissed from his office of Deputy Postmaster: through a partiality, for which there was no excuse, Wedderburn continued to be Solicitor-General. In the course of this year, Fox did his utmost to counsel discretion and conciliation, telling the House with a sense and a prescience not adequately valued, that "we were irritating the Americans without the power to force them. Whoever would govern a country without its consent, ensured resistance." He ridiculed Lord George Germaine for the notion that to repeal the tea duty was to give up the Constitution—"as if the tea duty were a part of the Constitution." At the close of 1774, Parliament was dissolved. The elections went in favour of the Court, not in small and venal constituencies only, but even in the City of Westminster; a majority being returned ready to act as a willing instrument in prosecuting the most deplorable, unnecessary, and humiliating contest ever waged by an English monarch, and sanctioned by a British Parliament.

In the new Parliament, Fox sat for Malmesbury. When the House met, at the beginning of 1775, he stood forth in formal opposition to the Ministry, and declared that "the greatest folly of his life was in having supported Lord North." He spoke out more strongly, and took higher ground in a debate on the

2nd of February, 1775. Lord North then moved an address to the Crown, beseeching the King to enforce due obedience to the laws and authority of the supreme Legislature, assuring him that the members of Parliament were resolved to stand by him, at the hazard of their lives and properties, against all rebellious attempts, and for the maintenance of the just rights of the Sovereign and of the two Houses of the Legislature. To this address Fox proposed an amendment acknowledging the receipt of certain papers, "deploring that the information which the papers have afforded serves only to convince this House that the measures taken by his Majesty's servants tend rather to widen than to heal the unhappy differences which have so long subsisted between Great Britain and America, and praying a speedy attention to the same." Three hundred and four members voted for the original motion; one hundred and five against it, and thus a civil war became inevitable. That Fox had done his utmost to avert the deplorable catastrophe was admitted by critics who were also his political opponents. Writing to Mr. Holroyd a few days afterwards, Gibbon said that Fox, "taking the vast compass of the question before us, discovered powers for regular debate which neither his friends hoped nor his enemies dreaded."

Notwithstanding his defeat on this momentous occasion, he persevered in urging temperate courses and conciliatory action. He opposed the Bill introduced to punish the Province of Massachusetts; he spoke and voted for Burke's plan for conciliation; he advocated the reception of a remonstrance from New York.

Alike privately and publicly he was earnest in winning over others to join him in the stand he made against the measures which had the King's approval. Lord Ossory and Mr. Fitzpatrick, the brothers of Lord Gower, he converted to his views. Both were induced to enter the ranks of the Opposition. To Lord Ossory he wrote that, unless "party does not blind me very much more than I am aware of, this is an occasion when a man not over-scrupulous ought to think for himself. It does not need surely the tenth part of your good sense to see how cruel and intolerable a thing it is to sacrifice thousands of lives almost without prospect of advantage."*

Shortly before the year closed he referred to the "American Prohibitory Bill" in the following impressive terms:—"I was in great hopes that the present Ministers had seen their error, and had given over coercion, and the idea of carrying on war with America by means of Acts of Parliament. In order to induce the Americans to submit to your Legislature, you pass laws against them, cruel and tyrannical in the extreme. If they complain of one law, your answer to their complaint is to pass another more rigorous than the former. But they are in rebellion, you say; if so, treat them as rebels are wont to be treated. Send out your fleets and armies against them, and subdue them; but let them have no reason to complain of your laws. Show them that your laws are mild, just, and equitable—that they, therefore, are in the wrong, and deserve the punishment they meet with. The very contrary of this has been your wretched policy. I have ever understood it as a first

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 140.

principle, that in rebellion you punish the individuals, but spare the country; but in a war against the enemy, it is your policy to spare the individuals and lay waste the country. This last has been invariably your conduct against America."*

Others, who concurred in the views of Fox, were utterly cast down at the futility of the efforts made to influence the Ministers and to arrest them in their deplorable projects. Sir George Savile told Lord Rockingham he was sure "we tend, by all we do, only to make the driving more furious," while the Duke of Richmond expressed his belief that the only thing which "can restore common sense to this country is feeling the dreadful consequences which must soon follow such diabolical measures." Unhappily for this country, the hour of awakening was too long delayed.

The war began in unpardonable blundering, was prosecuted with unprecedented incapacity, and ended in unparelleled disaster. The Ministry entirely misconceived the nature of the resistance they had to expect; what they fancied was a local disturbance which a regiment of infantry might easily suppress and an Act of Parliament could effectually punish, was the uprising of an entire people in defence of their rights and for the acquisition of their independence. When the news came that the royal arms had met with severe checks, and that the Americans had declared themselves independent, Fox was not surprised. The intelligence of some trifling successes in Canada did not make him alter his opinion as to the ultimate issue. On the 24th of June, he assured Lord Ossory in

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 50.

writing, that he was "still convinced the Americans will finally succeed, whether by victories or defeats." Four months later the royalist victories at Long Island only made him declare to Lord Rockingham his opinion that no countenance should be given to harsh measures against the Americans, and his hope that "it will be a point of honour among us all to support the American pretensions in adversity as much as we did in their prosperity, and that we shall never desert those who have acted *unsuccessfully* upon Whig principles, while we continue to profess our admiration of those who succeeded in the same principles in the year 1688."*

Arbitrary dealings with the colonists in the American Provinces, even though approved by a majority in Parliament, were as obnoxious to him as was the arbitrary treatment of the nation by Charles the First and James the Second in defiance of Parliament. The right of the people of England to resist and repel Charles and James was to his mind not more clearly established than the right of the American colonists to disown and resist the assumed supremacy of King George. In both cases, he considered the claims of the people superior to the pretensions of the Crown; and just as the triumph of Charles the First and James the Second would have involved the destruction of English freedom, so he believed the triumph of George the Third would have been followed by the establishment of despotic sway, firstly over America and secondly over Great Britain. The maintenance of the British Constitution depended upon the successful assertion of American independence.

He had already become a power in the House.

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 146.

Gibbon records that one of Fox's speeches at this time was the most masterly he had ever heard; that Thurlow and Wedderburn shrank from replying to it. The King evinces extreme hatred of Fox, and bears testimony to his pre-eminence by writing to Lord North on the 15th of November, 1776:— "I sincerely congratulate you on having [been] so little detained in the House of Commons this day; indeed I had learnt from Lord Weymouth that Charles Fox had declared at Arthur's last night that he should attend the business of the House this day, and either to-morrow or Sunday should set out for Paris, and not return till after the recess. I think therefore you cannot do better than bring as much forward during the time Parliament shall be assembled as can with propriety be done, as real business is never [so] well considered as when the attention of the House is not taken up by noisy declamations."* By real business, George the Third meant having his own way.

During this visit to Paris, in which Fox was accompanied by Mr. Fitzpatrick, he became conspicuous for recklessness as a gamester and by the extent of his losses. It puzzled Madame du Deffand, whose acquaintance he made, to find him so entirely indifferent and good humoured under a burden of debts which must have been embarrassing and ought to have been fraught with warning. On returning to his legislative duties at the beginning of 1777, he found the Rockingham party, with which he had acted but of which he had not formally become a member, dismayed at the events in America and disheartened about making any effectual resistance

* Correspondence of Geo. III. with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 40.

to the Ministry. Its members resolved upon making a silent protest by formally absenting themselves from Parliament. Fox would not join in this secession, but attended the House and raised his voice against every measure calculated to envenom and protract the war. He had ample reason for adversely criticising the manner in which the contest was conducted as well as for censuring the aims of its instigators and supporters. Against Lord George Germaine he delivered so bitter an invective that Lord North expressed his satisfaction in having not been the object of attack. During a visit to Ireland in the summer of this year, accompanied by Lord John Townshend; he made the personal acquaintance of Grattan. The freak of bathing in the Devil's Punch Bowl, through which his companion and himself endangered their lives, made them the subjects of general talk and admiration for spirit and daring.

The predictions of Fox at the outset of the war received confirmation in the capitulation of General Burgoyne to General Gates at Saratoga. This disaster was commemorated in an epigram :—

> "Burgoyne, unconscious of impending fates,
> Could cut his way through woods but not through Gates."

General Burgoyne, nicknamed the "Chrononhotonthologus of War," was a fluent writer of despatches and an incompetent officer; who maintained with plausible self-sufficiency in the House of Commons, that he ought to have succeeded in his plans, and whose strategic movements terminated in the surrender of himself and his army; who wrote one good comedy, the *Heiress*, and a proclamation to the Indians which it would be difficult to match for atrocity of sentiment.

The consequence of the surrender was to ensure the independence of the thirteen Provinces, for France now thought fit to acknowledge and aid the young nation, incurring on behalf of the United States of America an expenditure of seventy-two millions sterling.

Successive disasters inflamed Fox's mind against their cause; he denounced in glowing language the Crown which inspired the policy and the Minister who carried it out, ascribing much of the evils he deplored to the indolence and yielding temper of the latter. In reply to such an attack, Lord North said that, "as Fox had accused him of idleness, and of listening to flatterers, he passed a great deal of time in that House, where he could not be idle, and it was plain he was not flattered." A motion to consider the state of the nation was moved by Fox on the 2nd February, 1778, in a speech lasting two hours and a half. He then recapitulated the events which preceded and marked the campaign, depicting the rashness, obstinacy, and incompetence of the Government in vivid and powerful terms. He said they "mistook a single province for a whole continent; they mistook the single province of Massachusetts Bay for the American empire. Virginia, a colony no less jealous of its rights, nor less warm in its assertion of them, was entirely forgotten; it was not thought possible that any other colony should unite with Massachusetts. Now, whoever fights against ten men, and thinks he is only contending with one, will meet with more difficulties than if he was aware of the force brought against him; for I believe I may lay it down as an undoubted maxim in politics that every attempt to crush an insurrection, with means

inadequate to the end, foments instead of suppressing it. The case here was, you took a great object for a small one; you took thirteen provinces for one; and not only that, you imagined the other twelve were with you, when the very act you were then doing made those twelve equally hostile; for another misfortune at this time was the taking a violent step against the town of Boston. If America was not before sufficiently united in a determined resistance to the claims of this country, this measure made all America combined; they were all from that moment united with the town of Boston, which might have been before the object of the jealousy of the rest."*

No attempt was made to answer this scathing indictment: on a division, 165 voted with Fox; a minority so large as to astonish and terrify the Government. Of the impression made on contemporaries by this speech, the best account is that given by Walpole, in a letter to Mason:—"Charles Fox has tumbled Old Saturn [Chatham] from the throne of oratory, and if he has not all the dazzling lustre, has much more of the solid materials. They say nothing ever excelled his oration against the *unfortunate Minister* [North], who was truly unfortunate that day, for had Lord George Germaine been present, the thunder had fallen on him. Charles's speech on Monday was as marvellous for method and memory, and was really unanswerable, for not one of the Ministers knew what to say, and so said nothing, and that silence cost them many votes."†

In narrating these proceedings to Mr. Fitzpatrick,

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 104.
† Walpole's Letters, Cunningham's Edition, vol. vii., p. 25.

then in America, Fox said he thought the division "a very good one compared with the past, but a very bad one in my mind considering the circumstances of the country." What the Ministry intended doing he could not guess, unless it were to keep their places; he considered that "they know as little how to make peace as war." He also intimated his conviction, which was perfectly confirmed by results, that the Opposition will "so far succeed as to get great divisions in the House of Commons, and to convince all the world that the Ministers deserve all possible contempt; but when we have done that, we shall have done all we can do, and that the Ministers, though despised everywhere and by everybody, will still continue Ministers."*

A few days after this speech was delivered, Lord North produced consternation among his followers by introducing a Bill conceding to the Americans all that they had asked and all that had been refused to them a few years previously; a Bill resembling in its main provisions the scheme which, two years earlier, Burke, in a speech which ranks among his masterpieces, vainly implored the House to accept. The plan had the fatal defect of appearing too liberal to the extreme war party in this country, and in being too niggardly in the opinion of the Americans. Coming too late, it was a confession of weakness rather than a soothing and gratifying concession. Lord North, being conscious of his inability to carry on the contest with any hope of success, requested the King's permission to resign. The King, who would not willingly part with a Minister so much after his own heart, re-

* Memorials, vol. i., pp. 168, 169.

fused to accept his resignation, but agreed to the reconstitution of the Ministry. He wrote to his favourite Minister that any persons would be accepted who would strengthen the Administration; that he would "not object to Lord Shelburne and Mr. Barré, who personally, perhaps, I dislike as much as Alderman Wilkes." Even Lord Chatham was admissible, provided he consented to serve through the intermediary of Lord North, the King solemnly declaring than he would not see him till the Ministry was formed, and adding the following words, which need no comment. "I do not expect Lord Chatham and his crew will come to your assistance."* In another letter, the King styles Lord Chatham "that perfidious man." Three weeks later, Chatham had the seizure in the House of Lords which was speedily followed by his decease. On hearing that his illustrious subject was sick unto death, the King's first impression was not regret for an impending loss, but was manifested in the following suggestion to Lord North:—"May not the political exit of Lord Chatham incline you to continue at the head of my affairs?"

What George the Third dreaded, should Lord North resign, was forming a new Ministry from the ranks of the Opposition, a Ministry which would inevitably terminate the war with America on the best terms that could be obtained. Now, to end the war with the recognition of American independence was what the King most heartily disliked. His feelings on this head were expressed to Lord North without any reserve or disguise:—"No consideration in life shall make me stoop to Opposition. I am still ready

* Quoted in Memorials, vol. i., p. 189.

to accept any part of them that will come to the assistance of my present efficient Ministers; but whilst any ten men in the kingdom will stand by me, I will not give myself up into bondage. My dear lord, I will rather risk my crown than do what I think personally disgraceful; and whilst I have no wish but for the good and prosperity of my country, it is impossible that the nation shall not stand by me; if they will not, they shall have another king, for I will never put my hand to what would make me miserable to the last hour of my life." *

While Lord North frequently pleaded in abject terms for permission to resign and as frequently yielded with a foolish pliancy to the King's entreaties to remain at the head of the Government, and while the King expressed his resolve never to end the war so long as the Americans claimed their independence, the result, which was daily becoming more certain, had been placed beyond all probability of change by the treaty of peace and amity concluded between France and the United States of America. Mr. Fitzpatrick, on his return from America, told the House of Commons that the conciliatory scheme of Lord North, deemed by many a measure of extreme concession, had occasioned the greatest dissatisfaction in the royal army, and had excited the contempt of the American people. General Burgoyne, who had now returned from the scene of his terrible humiliation, informed the House that he was ready to make disclosures which "would astonish everybody." Influenced by these considerations, Fox made a telling speech when the House re-assembled in November, and gave the

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 153.

following sensible advice to the Ministry:—"My opinion is for withdrawing your forces from America entirely, for a defensive war you can never think of; a defensive war would ruin this nation at any time, and in any circumstances. An offensive war is pointed out as proper for this country. Our situation points it out, and the spirit of the nation impels us to attack rather than defence. Attack France, then, for she is your object; the nature of the war with her is quite different. The war against America is against your own countrymen; that against France is against your inveterate enemy and rival. Every blow you strike in America is against yourselves, even though you should be able, which you never will be, to force them to submit. Every stroke against France is of advantage to you; the more you lower her scale, the more your own rises, and the more the Americans will be detached from her as useless to them. Even your victories over America are favourable to France, from what they must cost you in men and money; your victories over France will be felt by her ally. America must be conquered in France; France can never be conquered in America." * It is noteworthy that the King made a suggestion to the same effect as that contained in the closing sentences of the foregoing extract; the only valuable suggestion which proceeded from him in the whole course of the contest; but, unlike his unwise and impracticable views, it remained unheeded and ineffectual. For the moment he was satisfied, Lord North having been induced to continue Premier, and Thurlow having consented to become Lord Chancellor.

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 136.

Public attention was temporarily diverted from the war to the trial of Admiral Keppel, which began early in 1779. The court-martial upon Keppel was held in consequence of an accusation of cowardice preferred by Sir Hugh Palliser, his second in command, at the engagement with the French fleet, commanded by Admiral Count d'Orvilliers, off Ushant. Keppel had accompanied Lord Anson in his voyage round the world; he was accounted a good seaman; he was known to be a warm politician and a thorough Whig. Palliser, on the other hand, was a favourite at Court, and a constant supporter of every government which had the King's approval and confidence. It was supposed that in the present case, as in that of Admiral Byng, a sacrifice was about to be made of a man who was obnoxious to the Ministers, in order to veil their own incompetence. Party spirit ran high; to acquit Keppel was indirectly to censure the Government. The accused Admiral, in a manly speech, exculpated himself to the satisfaction of every impartial listener. He told the court, with great truth and effect, that his "forty years' endeavours were not marked by the possession of any one favour from the Crown except that of its confidence in time of danger." He was honourably acquitted, and his accuser was generally regarded as having preferred an unfounded charge in order to gratify malicious party feelings. When the news of the acquittal reached London, thousands of houses were illuminated, either to testify the general joy or out of fear of the mob that broke the windows in which no lights appeared. The gates of the Admiralty were forced, the windows demolished, and Lord Sandwich, the first Lord, compelled to flee for

his life, in company with his mistress. It was said that Fox, Mr. T. Grenville, Lord Derby, and the Duke of Ancaster were among the rioters. Sir Hugh Palliser made what was believed to be a virtual admission of guilt by resigning his seat at the Admiralty, his Governorship of Scarborough Castle, and his Lieutenant-generalship of the Marines. Keppel received the thanks of the House of Commons.

The proceedings against Keppel, the unpopularity of the Ministry, the unabated desire of Lord North to quit office, led to repeated overtures on the part of the Court to members of the Opposition. To Fox personally, the way to power was open and easy, provided only he would renounce his opposition to the war. Referring to what had occurred the previous year, Mr. Hare thus writes to George Selwyn :—"A great part of the Opposition have certainly had offers of coming in, but not in terms that they like, and I do think it does Charles, or ought to do him, great credit, that under all his distresses he never thinks of accepting a place on terms that are in the least degree disreputable; and I assure you, upon my honour, that he has had many flattering terms made him more than once of late, and has never for a moment hesitated about rejecting them."*

While he was not, as he states in a letter to Lord Rockingham, "personally over-eager to accept office," he was at the same time anxious that the Whig leaders should not be too uncompromising in their conditions and conduct. In the same letter, he very sensibly remarks, it has always been his opinion "that power (whether over a people or a king) obtained by

* George Selwyn and his Contemporaries, vol. iii., p. 292.

gentle means, by the goodwill of the person to be governed, and, above all, by degrees rather than by a sudden exertion of strength, is in its nature more durable and firm, than any advantage that can be obtained by contrary means."*

Whilst these negotiations were in progress, Lord North met with a defeat in the House of Commons, which confirmed him in his determination to retire. A majority of 158 to 143 gave leave to bring in a Bill forbidding contractors to sit in Parliament, and this vote was given in spite of Lord North's declared opposition to the proposal. Commenting upon the vote, the King expressed his own opinion, and at the same time exhibited what his views were of constitutional procedure:—"I am sorry Lord North takes so much to heart the division of this day; I am convinced this country will never regain a proper tone unless Ministers, as in the reign of King William, will not mind being now and then in a minority, particularly on subjects that have always carried some weight with popular opinions. If it comes to the worst, the Bill will be thrown out in the House of Lords." † George the Third was not more ready to sanction extreme courses and to exercise arbitrary rule, than he was to look to the House of Lords to aid him by a vote in opposing all the popular measures he dreaded and detested. On this occasion, the Peers meekly deferred to the King's wishes, and rejected the Bill by 57 to 41. Lord Hillsborough, Secretary of State, laughed to scorn the reforming temper of the Commons, calling it "virtue run mad." ‡

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 207.
† Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 228.
‡ Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 397.

The necessity for strengthening the Government became so clear that Lord Thurlow was specially empowered by the King to enter into communication with the leaders of the Opposition, in order that efficient substitutes might be found for Lord North and others who shared his unpopularity. The advances on the one side were met by peremptory refusals on the other. This might have been expected, seeing that the basis of negotiations, as stated in the following letter from the King, was such as to render a real and salutary change altogether hopeless. He declared himself willing "to blot from his remembrance any events that may have displeased him, and to admit into his confidence and service any men of public spirit or talents who will join with part of his present Ministry in forming one on a more enlarged plan, provided it be understood that every means are to [be] employed to keep the empire entire, to prosecute the present just and unprovoked war in all its branches with the utmost vigour, and that his Majesty's past measures be treated with proper respect." * His desire was that of all arbitrary rulers—to have servants who rank the pleasure of their Sovereign above the service of their country.

During the summer of this year the nation urgently felt the want of a great Ministry to guide its destinies. For several weeks, the combined fleets of France and Spain rode triumphant in the Channel and threatened Plymouth. Not even at the time when the Armada approached these shores was our fleet in more imminent peril of destruction, or a successful landing more probable. It seemed, indeed, as if the enemy were un-

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 329.

aware of the ease with which they could effect their purpose; for, instead of taking advantage of the opportunity, the combined fleets cruised about, made a menacing demonstration, and then sailed away without having fired a shot.

When Parliament met in the autumn, Mr. Adam, a member of the Opposition, stated his intention of taking his place among the supporters of the Government. Commenting upon this, Fox said that Mr. Adam, "at the beginning of the last session, thought the Ministers wrong; but the operations of the last campaign had taught him to think that Ministers were right; or, in other words, that, having once thought ill of them, a line of conduct still more disgraceful, more infamous, more destructive and ruinous, had at once done away the bad impression which their less humiliating and less mischievous conduct challenged, and had determined him to support them. This, he would be bold to say, was soaring to the very summit of political paradox and parliamentary enigma." For these and other strong expressions of opinion, Mr. Adam sent a challenge to Fox. They fought with pistols, two rounds being fired; at the second, Fox was shot in the stomach. Then, in accordance with the manners of the age, he intimated that he meant nothing personal to Mr. Adam, who declared himself perfectly satisfied. On grounds which appeared equally rational to contemporaries and childish to us, Lord Shelburne fought with Fullerton, Pitt with Tierney, Canning with Lord Castlereagh. What puzzles sensible people now is that the explanations which were readily accepted as perfectly satisfactory after pistol shots had been exchanged, with or without blood being shed,

could not have been made in the first instance and the firing dispensed with. However absurd these proceedings appear now, they were regarded as quite proper and commendable a century ago, and Fox gained additional popularity from his duel. Mr. Adam, having failed to kill him, afterwards became his intimate and attached friend.

On the 6th of December, being his first appearance in the House after the duel, he made a reply to Mr. Dundas on the motion about discontents in Ireland, of which the reporter says, "It would be a vain attempt to endeavour to follow the honourable gentleman through a speech which took an hour and a half in the delivery, and which was delivered with a rapidity of utterance, a flow of language, and in a strain of oratory rarely equalled." Unsatisfactory as this avowal is to readers who desire to judge for themselves as to the speech, yet the tone and views of the speaker may be distinctly inferred from the following extract. After animadverting on the inflammatory part of Mr. Dundas's speech, Fox ascribed the prevailing mischief to the contest in which the country had rashly embarked. "It was that accursed war that had led us, step by step, into all our present misfortunes and national disgraces. What was the cause of our wasting forty millions of money and sixty thousand lives? The American war. What was it that produced the French rescript and a French war? The American war. What was it that produced the Spanish manifesto and Spanish war? The American war. What was it that armed 42,000 men in Ireland with the arguments carried on the point of 42,000 bayonets? The American war. For what were we

about to incur an additional debt of twelve or fourteen millions? That accursed, diabolical, and cruel American war." *

Though the majority in Parliament enabled the Ministry to persist in a vain attempt to coerce the Americans, and the policy of the Court had the apparent sanction of the representatives of the nation, yet popular feeling ran high against the great and increasing power of the Crown. The freeholders of Yorkshire met and agreed to petition for a redress of grievances and a reform in Parliament. In other counties, such as Sussex, Hertfordshire, Cheshire, Devonshire, Essex, Bedfordshire, Dorsetshire, Buckinghamshire, this example was speedily followed. In Devonshire a resort to force, if necessary, was contemplated, a fund being voted for buying arms.†

The electors of the city of Westminster met for the same object in Westminster Hall on the 2nd of February, 1780. It was estimated that three thousand persons were present. Conspicuous among the number were the Duke of Portland, Wilkes, Earl Temple, Sawbridge, Burgoyne, and Burke. Fox took the chair and delivered a splendid harangue. A petition similar to that from the county of York was adopted. Before the proceedings terminated, it was proposed and carried by acclamation that Fox, then lauded as the "Man of the People," should be one of the future candidates for Westminster. Walpole records that "Wilkes was his zealous advocate," and points the irony of events by adding, "How few years since a public breakfast was given at Holland

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 216.
† Walpole's Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. ii., p. 36.

House to support Colonel Luttrel against Wilkes!" * The popularity Fox now enjoyed, excited the wonder of Walpole, who states that, when dismissed from Lord North's Ministry six years previously, "his character was so decried that the mob believed he was turned out for robbing the Treasury." † It is surprising, however, that the legacy of opprobrium left to him by his father, coupled with his own reckless habits of life, should not have weighed longer and more heavily upon him. That he should so soon have inspired entire confidence in his honesty of conduct and liberality of purpose proves how vigorous had been his opposition to the policy of the Government and the Court. In a speech delivered on the 5th of April in the same place, he denounced the manner in which the country was then governed, declared himself in favour of a thorough reform in the representation of the people, including triennial or even annual Parliaments. His uncle, the Duke of Richmond, went even further; he advocated universal suffrage.

This zeal on behalf of the people exposed him to angry taunts and to frequent charges of inconsistency. His conduct with respect to the Middlesex election being contrasted by Mr. Dundas with his conduct now, his answer was an appeal "to the recollection of every man in the House who was present at the time, whether he did not, in the opinion which he gave in the affairs of the Middlesex election, build all his arguments on the power of the people. Every topic which he urged was founded on this popular and proper

* Cunningham's Edition of Walpole's Letters, vol. vii., p. 328.
† Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. i., p. 321.

doctrine, and was intended to maintain the power of the people in opposition to that of the Crown and the House of Lords." He stated in the same speech that "there was no man who had been more systematic in his opinions and in his conduct than himself. The noble lord in the blue ribbon [Lord North] would do him the justice to say so. It was his fault and his misfortune to be too stubborn in his temper, too much indisposed to the courting of popularity, and too much matched and wedded to his opinions when formed." * As he was frequently accused of inconsistency in this matter, and as the reports of what he said at the time are very imperfect, this defence, made when the proceedings were still remembered by those who had listened to him, renders it quite certain that his early union with Lord North was not intimate and binding.

The speech, in which he repelled the foregoing charges, was delivered in support of the famous motion by Dunning, to the effect "that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished." An amendment moved by Dundas, to prefix to the motion the words, "It is now necessary to declare," was, contrary to the expectation of the Government, accepted by Fox on the part of the Opposition, and the motion, as amended, was carried by 233 to 215. About three weeks later, another motion against dissolving Parliament before effect had been given to that just named, was moved by Dunning and lost; the Court having employed the interval in obtaining recruits by the means commonly employed in those days. Supporting this motion, Fox

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 256.

noticed remarks made by Lord Hillsborourgh, reflecting on the private vices of members of the Opposition in the House of Commons, and made the following avowal:—"He was as ready as any man to own that gaming was a vice, but surely he had a right to say it was a vice countenanced by the fashion of the times—a vice to which some of the greatest characters had given way in the early part of their lives, and a vice which carried with it its own punishment, and entailed a curse upon those who were addicted to it." *

The disgraceful episode of the Gordon riots temporarily yet effectually checked the movement for reform, and indirctly strengthened the position of the Government. Whether fanatic or madman, Lord George Gordon was the cause of a riot in which hundreds of lives were lost and an incalculable amount of property destroyed. His followers, who professed an ardent attachment to Protestantism, were energetic in burning and plundering houses. No person of sense can refuse to concur with Walpole in abhorring "such Protestantism as breathes the soul of Popery, and commences a reformation by attempting a massacre." At this crisis, George the Third displayed judicious and praiseworthy firmness. By ordering the soldiers to attack the rioters, whom the supineness of the magistrates had suffered to become almost masters of London, he probably saved the capital from being sacked.

Utterly incompetent to deal with this outburst of lawlessness, Lord North showed much genuine nobility of sentiment when the danger was over, and the panic-

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 264.

stricken members of his party were longing to make scapegoats of the Roman Catholics. Declaring that he was not disposed to withdraw any portion of the toleration which the Roman Catholics enjoyed, he received from Fox a splendid tribute for rising superior to his position, and displaying a really enlightened mind. Fox himself, in what Walpole calls "one of his finest speeches," strongly opposed harsh measures against the Roman Catholics, and uttered the following confession of political faith:—"He was a friend to universal toleration, and an enemy to that narrow way of thinking that made men come to Parliament, not for the removal of some great grievances which they themselves felt, but to desire Parliament to shackle and fetter their fellow-subjects. . . . He declared himself against everything that had the least tendency to bridle and restrain liberty of conscience."*

Parliament was dissolved on the 1st of September, 1780. Fox was a candidate for Westminster, where he was opposed by Lord Lincoln, the nominee of the Court. Shortly before this, the King wrote that "Fox never had any principle, and can therefore act as his interest may guide him;" at the same time refusing his sanction to a projected Administration in which Fox should have a leading place. To hinder his election for Westminster was now the aim of the Monarch. Eight thousand pounds were expended out of the civil list, in order to procure the return of Lord Lincoln instead of Fox; but the victory of the "Man of the People" was secured in spite of royal cajolery and lavish bribery.

Admiral Keppel was a candidate to represent the

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 277.

royal borough of Windsor. He lost his election by a small majority. The King openly canvassed for his opponent, "yet, meeting him on the terrace there, told him he hoped he would carry his election." * The bias of the King was so well known that, just as at an earlier date the young Prince of Wales found that the best way to annoy his father was to shout "Wilkes and No. 45 for ever," so now the young Duke of Sussex found he could do likewise by wearing the Keppel colours. For this, he was locked up in the nursery. Notwithstanding the Admiral's failure at Windsor, he was not excluded from Parliament. The freeholders of Surrey, though he had no interest or stake in the county, returned him without solicitation as one of their representatives in the House of Commons.

In the debate on the Address after the new Parliament met in November, Fox reiterated his condemnation of the American war, and declared that he "would not thank his own brother, who was now serving in America, for any success he might obtain. As long as he lived he would never join in a vote of thanks to any officer whose laurels were gathered in the American war; and his reason was, that he hated and detested the war; he regarded it as the fountain-head of all the mischief and all the calamities which this miserable country laboured under at this moment." Early in 1781, he moved a resolution condemnatory of the appointment of Sir Hugh Palliser as governor of Greenwich Hospital. The resolution was inspired by objections to the principle of the appointment rather than by any personal antipathy.

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 426.

Fox affirmed that "he knew not that man on earth against whom he harboured the least personal enmity." An amendment, moved by Lord North, was carried by a considerable majority. Yet the motion, which was declared by the Ministry to be utterly obnoxious and wholly inadmissible, was entirely incorporated with this amendment. The King was as satisfied with the result as he was incensed against the proposer of the original motion; he wrote to Lord North, "The question proposed by Mr. Fox on the appointment of Sir Hugh Palliser to the government of Greenwich Hospital was unjust and indecent, as everything that comes from that quarter naturally must be expected; the amendment as proper and putting everything in its true light, as the author of it will always wish to act; the majority very handsome." *

A debate on Burke's Bill for the reduction of the Civil List, which took place on the 26th of February, was rendered remarkable by the first appearance in debate of the second son of the Earl of Chatham. His speech was declared by Lord North to be the best first speech he had ever heard; it was welcomed with the greater cordiality by Fox because it ably supported the view of the Opposition. He warmly congratulated William Pitt; while doing so, an old member, said to be General Grant, remarked, "Aye, Mr. Fox, you are praising young Pitt for his speech. You may well do so; for, excepting yourself, there's no man in the House can make such another; and, old as I am, I expect and hope to hear you both battling it within these walls as I have

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 35.

done your fathers before you." With great tact and delicacy, Pitt, coming to the rescue of Fox, who was disconcerted by the dubious compliment, replied, "I have no doubt, general, you would like to attain the age of Methuselah." * If the general had but lived four years longer, he would have seen the two men battling, as their fathers had done before them, and have heard Fox address the following reproaches to Pitt:—"He had always wished to stand well with the right honourable gentleman. He remembered the day he had first congratulated the House on the acquisition of his abilities; it had been his pride to fight side by side with him the battles of the Constitution, little thinking that he would one day desert his principles, and lend himself to be the instrument of that secret influence which they had both combated so successfully. He might have been prepared to find a formidable rival in the right hon. gentleman—a rival that would leave him far behind in the pursuit of glory—but he never could have expected that he would have descended so low as to be the persecutor of any man. I fancied I saw in him so much generosity of soul, so much elevation of mind, that so grovelling a passion as malice could not have found an asylum in his heart." †

On the 12th of June, he moved for a Committee to take into consideration the State of the American War. The speech ended with a prediction which was verified almost to the letter:—"Like the Crusaders in the holy war, who went to fight for the sepulchre of our Saviour, and to possess Palestine, in order to

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 262.
† Speeches, vol. iii., p. 31.

have the honour of guarding the sepulchre, though the body had been translated to another place for many centuries, the present Ministers, treading in the footsteps of those bloody and senseless zealots, still continued to contend for the possession of an empty sepulchre: they had relinquished taxation; they had given up legislation; they had even offered to pay the debts of the Americans; and, instead of giving them laws, of receiving laws from them; but yet this holy land was to be made the scene of a holy war, because at a former period they told Parliament and the nation, that they would tax and make laws for America. . . . I did not hear a word said against my motion, but that it would lead to American independence; all therefore I have to do is, to answer that objection by taking upon me to predict that Ministers themselves, in the course of six months from this day, will offer some proposition similar to that which I have taken the liberty to submit to the House."*

While leading the opposition to the Ministry, he was hardly less conspicuous in the pursuit of pleasure. Writing to Sir Horace Mann, Walpole says:— "Mr. Fox is the first figure in all the places I have mentioned; the hero in Parliament, at the gaming-table, at Newmarket. Last week he passed four-and-twenty hours without interruption at all three, or on the road from one to the other; and ill the whole time, for he has a bad constitution, and treats it as if he had been dipped in the immortal river: but I doubt his heel at least will be vulnerable." †

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 397.
† Walpole's Letters, vol. viii., p. 41.

The natural results of his devotion to gaming, were embarrassments which led to the sale of his effects. On the 20th of June, 1781, his library was sold by auction; among the books was a presentation copy of the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, with the following entry on the fly-leaf:—"The author, at Brooke's, said that there was no salvation for this country till six heads of the principal persons in the Administration were laid on the table; eleven days after, this same gentleman accepted the place of Lord of Trade, under those very Ministers, and has acted with them ever since." That this entry should have made the volume fetch the price of three guineas, excites Walpole's amazement. Were the volume put up for sale now, no bidder would have any chance of acquiring it on such easy terms. The anecdote itself is interesting as showing that Gibbon was as ready to sacrifice principles for office as men far less erudite and able. Another one discredits his sincerity in a greater degree. In 1777, when the majority for continuing hostilities with America, as shown by the vote on the Address, was 243 to 86, Gibbon told Walpole soon afterwards "he was convinced that, if it had not been for shame, there were not twenty men in the House but were ready to vote for peace." Walpole's comment is that he did not "think it very decent in so sensible a man to support the war, and make such a confession."*

What the eloquence of Fox could not accomplish, and could hardly accelerate, was effected by the irresistible current of events. No disaster, however, could induce the King to say that the hour had arrived for

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 166.

making peace with America. He wrote to Lord North that "the getting of a peace at the expense of a separation from America is a step to which no difficulties shall ever get me to be in the smallest degree an instrument." * The surrender of Lord Cornwallis did not damp his ardour for continuing the contest; he professed himself ready to sacrifice the last of his soldiers rather than yield. Being acquainted with the monarch's fatal obstinacy, Fox wrote to Fitzpatrick, "It is intolerable to think that it should be in the power of one blockhead to do so much mischief;" and said in the House of Commons, "he was glad to find that he had discovered who the evil spirit was that conducted all our mischief: it was a person higher than the noble Lord in the blue ribbon; for the noble Lord was only his puppet, and acted as he was told." † Lord George Germaine, who, as Wilkes had wittily and truly said, might conquer America, "but not in Germany," saw that the end was approaching, that the recognition of American independence was inevitable; and, refusing his countenance to such a measure, he resigned office. The King, to mark approval of his conduct and sentiments, raised him to the peerage, with the title of Viscount Sackville, and informed Lord North, "I shall only add, that on one material point I shall ever coincide with Lord George Germaine, that is, against a separation from America, and I shall never lose an opportunity of declaring that no consideration shall ever make me in the smallest degree an instrument in a measure that I am confident would

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 398.
† Speeches, vol. ii., p. 29.

annihilate the rank in which this empire stands among the European States, and would render my situation in this country below continuing an object with me." *

Despite the incapacity of George the Third to read the signs of the times, and his refusal to occupy with grace the position which the misfortunes of war, changes in public opinion and within the walls of Parliament, had prepared for him, the inevitable end arrived. After having been Premier for twelve years, Lord North notified his resignation, and that of his colleagues, on the 20th March, 1782; from this day dates the virtual acknowledgment by this country that the thirteen Provinces of North America had conquered a place among the nations of the earth. However unwelcome such an event might be to desponding patriots and arrogant courtiers, all good men rejoiced, inasmuch as it was far preferable to the continuance of the least excusable, the most unnatural, and, till eclipsed by another struggle on the same continent, the bloodiest and most costly civil war ever waged by English-speaking men.

Lord North, the Minister responsible for this war, was in his thirty-eighth year when he accepted the office of First Lord of the Treasury, which the Duke of Grafton felt he could no longer hold with benefit to the country and with honour to himself. His appearance at that time is vividly depicted by Walpole :—"Nothing could be more coarse or clumsy or ungracious than his outside. Two large prominent eyes that rolled about to no

* Correspondence with Lord North, vol. ii., p. 403.

purpose (for he was utterly short-sighted), a wide mouth, thick lips, and inflated visage, gave him the air of a blind trumpeter. A deep untunable voice, which, instead of modulating, he enforced with unnecessary pomp, a total neglect of his person, and ignorance of every civil attention, disgusted all who judge by appearance, or withhold their approbation till it is courted. But within that rude casket were enclosed many useful talents. He had much wit, good-humour, strong natural sense, assurance, and promptness, both of conception and execution."* Another contemporary, as competent as Walpole to form an opinion, and far less fond of mere scandal, bears testimony that, "the word 'gentleman' was never applied to any person in a higher degree, or more generally, than it was to Lord North, and all he said or did in the House of Commons," and that "among his political adversaries he had not a single enemy." †

His greatest fault was indolence; his most serious shortcoming was irresolution. Mr. Eden, writing of him during an excursion in the country, says "he is just as undecided in a party of pleasure as he is in any other party." Yet he was a welcome guest everywhere. In an age of wits, he had few equals in repartee. Nothing could be happier than his reply to Sheridan, who told him that he had taken a new house, and that henceforth everything would go on like clockwork. "Aye," said his lordship, "tick, tick." Hannah Moore, who once met him in company, relates that he "was delightfully entertaining, and told some excellent stories, at which he has a very

* Memoirs of the Reign of George III., vol. iv., p. 78.
† Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i., p. 156.

great talent; possessing in perfection the art of grave humour." *

The secret of Lord North's power as a Minister was not his subserviency to the King, but his extraordinary tact in managing the House of Commons. This is an art which, in the leader of our great popular assembly, is worth more than genius; for men of undoubted genius have utterly failed to acquire the command of that House, even when obtaining votes of confidence. In the old bad days of corruption the men who bribed the highest were not the most stable and powerful leaders. Henry Fox was as lavish with the money of the State as any of his predecessors, yet he never held the place in the esteem of the House which Sir Robert Walpole occupied during twenty years. George Grenville and General Conway were both able and upright men, but they never understood and ruled the House as Lord North did. Lord John Russell was intellectually superior to Lord Palmerston, as Mr. Gladstone is superior to Mr. Disraeli; but Lord John Russell has been the least genial leader of the House in our day, with the exception of Mr. Gladstone while Lord Palmerston has had no equals in this particular since the time of Lord North and Fox, with the exceptions of Lord Althorp and Mr. Disraeli. If Lord North had been as great a statesman as he was a parliamentary tactician, his name would have been one of the brightest in the annals of the eighteenth century. He was a genial man, abounding in loyalty and fine intentions, who sacrificed his good name to serve his King, and who submitted to the discredit of losing thirteen Provinces in America.

* Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. ii., p. 12.

The most noteworthy circumstance connected with Lord North's fall was not the exultation of the leaders of the Opposition, but the intense satisfaction of the most ardent royalists. No man in the kingdom was a more uncompromising Tory than Dr. Johnson. His pamphlet, entitled *Taxation no Tyranny,* was written to demonstrate that to war with America had been, in his opinion, to carry on a justifiable crusade for the absolute supremacy of the mother country. Warmly though he approved of the contest, he was not blind to the blunders and incompetence of its conductors. Hence it was that he spoke of the disgrace of the Ministers in such language as the following:—"I am glad the Ministry is removed. Such a bunch of imbecility never disgraced a country. If they sent a messenger into the City to take up a printer, the messenger was taken up instead of the printer and committed by the sitting Alderman. If they sent one army to the relief of another, the first army was defeated before the other arrived. I will not say that what they did was always wrong, but it was always done at a wrong time." On the 20th of March he made this entry in his journal:—"The Ministry is dissolved: I prayed with Francis and gave thanks." Millions throughout the land united with him in the thanksgiving.

III.

BECOMES SECRETARY OF STATE.

WHILE lamenting Lord North's fall from power and the impossibility of continuing to shed the blood of his soldiers in a contest with Englishmen settled in America, George the Third had to endure the not less bitter mortification of entrusting the Marquess of Rockingham with the seals which Lord North had resigned. This was the second time, in a reign of twenty years, the King had been compelled to place the administration of affairs in the hands of a professedly Whig Ministry. Both the Earl of Chatham and the Duke of Grafton were Whigs in politics, yet the Administrations of which they were the leading members were composite political groups of men whose allegiance was given to the King rather than to the heads of any party. In these Ministries the King had friends who took care that his personal wishes should be primarily and studiously considered. During the first Administration of Lord Rockingham, he had no such influence. Measures which he detested, of which the repeal of the Stamp Act was one, were introduced and carried, notwithstanding his declared disapproval. He considered it a real triumph to have succeeded in displacing that Administration, and it was exceedingly mortifying to have to restore its head to power. Hence,

he laboured to sow dissension among the leaders of the Opposition in order, if possible, to ensure the formation of a Government in which he would have a preponderating voice. Instead, then, of at once calling upon Lord Rockingham to form an Administration, he sent for Lord Shelburne, the leader of the small band of Whigs who had adhered to Lord Chatham, and desired him to fill Lord North's place. On Lord Shelburne declining, application was made to Lord Gower, who represented the Bedford section; receiving a refusal from him, the King then commissioned Lord Shelburne to make arrangements, on his behalf, with Lord Rockingham. This course was at once the most unconstitutional and the most offensive to the acknowledged head of the Opposition. Lord Shelburne had previously intimated to Lord Rockingham the offer he had received and his rejection of it, adding, "My lord, you could stand without me, but I could not without you." It was galling to Lord Rockingham to be entrusted with the task of forming a Ministry in these circumstances, and he shrank from submitting to what was intended as a slight. Out of deference, however, to the representations of his friends, he did not resent the affront. On the 27th of March, after the preliminaries were settled, he was admitted to an audience with the King; the new Administration was then definitively constituted, Lord Shelburne and Fox being the two Secretaries of State.

What Lord Rockingham specially desired to accomplish is shown in the propositions which, as the Rev. Richard Watson (afterwards Bishop of Llandaff) records, had received the King's explicit assent before he accepted the Premiership. These were, "There being

no *veto* put on the acknowledging the independence of America; the suffering the Contractors and Custom-house Officers bill to pass; the reduction of the influence of the Crown, by the abolition of useless offices; the introduction of a system of general economy in every department of State." *

As Secretary of State, Fox displayed great aptitude for business, and set a good example by upholding the dignity of his office; differing in this from others who had enjoyed the King's confidence and filled important posts in the State,—the Earl of Sandwich, Lord Weymouth, Earl Gower, Lord Northington, and Lord Chancellor Thurlow. He made it a rule, while Minister, to relinquish those habits of gaming which had been taught him by his father, and for which he retained a deplorable fondness. The members of Brooke's, who were in arrears with their subscriptions, paid what was due that they might enter the Club and converse with the Minister; but, to their unconcealed vexation, he seldom gave them the opportunity. Writing to Sir Horace Mann on the 5th of May, 1782, Walpole says, "Mr. Fox already shines as greatly in place as he did in Opposition, though infinitely more difficult a task. He is now as indefatigable as he was idle. He has perfect temper, and not only good humour but good nature; and, which is the first quality of a Prime Minister in a free country, has more common sense than any man, with amazing parts, that are neither ostentatious nor affected." †

The indirect and underhand manner in which the

* Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, vol. i., p. 96.

† Horace Walpole's Letters, vol. viii., p. 217.

Cabinet had been formed proved fatal to harmonious action. Lord Shelburne reluctantly deferred to Lord Rockingham and intentionally thwarted Fox, while Lord Thurlow, who had been indiscreetly permitted to retain the Chancellorship, delighted in brewing mischief and betraying his colleagues. In this, the Lord Chancellor was effectually seconded by another member of the preceding Government, Lord Advocate Dundas, who had been suffered to retain his place without any assurance that he would change his politics. Before a week or two had elapsed, Fox keenly felt the difficulties of his position, and informed his friend Fitzpatrick that, if he found it impossible to carry his measures of retrenchment and reform, he would at once retire and "go to war again." On the 28th of April he wrote :—"Shelburne shows himself more and more every day, is ridiculously jealous of my encroaching on his department, and wishes very much to encroach upon mine. He hardly liked my having a letter from Grattan, or my having written one to Lord Charlmont. He affects the Minister more and more every day, and is, I believe, perfectly confident that the King intends to make him so. Provided we can stay in long enough to have given a good stout blow to the influence of the Crown, I do not think it much signifies how soon we go out after, and leave him and the Chancellor to make such a Government as they can, and this I think we shall be able to do." * If proof were wanted of the disinterestedness of Fox, the foregoing extract from a private letter would supply it ; the possession of place was to him something to be desired for other and

* Memorials, vol. i., p. 316.

nobler motives than the enjoyment of salary and power.

Some of the measures to which Fox attached great importance, such as the Bill forbidding contractors to have seats in Parliament and that for the reduction of the Civil List, became law; steps were taken for quieting discontent in Ireland by repealing Poyning's Act and thereby bestowing legislative independence on the Irish Parliament, while progress was made towards concluding a treaty of peace with America. On the latter point, Fox was thwarted alike by his colleague and the King. As Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the negotiation of treaties with foreign powers was in Fox's department, while Lord Shelburne, in whose department colonial affairs were transacted, claimed a right to supervise matters which concerned America. The consequence was that Mr. Thomas Grenville went to Paris as plenipotentiary to negotiate with M. de Vergennes under the superintendence of Fox, while Mr. Oswald was despatched on a similar mission to negotiate with Dr. Franklin under the superintendence of Lord Shelburne. The want of a common understanding between the respective agents of the English Government permitted M. de Vergennes and Dr. Franklin to play off the one agent against the other, and to prefer demands which they would never have mooted had the transaction been conducted with less ambiguity and under a sense of direct personal responsibility.

Lord Rockingham died, after a brief illness, on the 1st of July. The King was generally reproached for never making a single inquiry about the First Minister of the Crown during his last illness. In this

respect he displayed more than his usual sincerity; had he manifested any regret for the Minister "whose virtues were his arts," he would have been chargeable with a fresh instance of hypocrisy.

Prior to that event, Fox had intimated to the rest of the Ministers his resolution to resign.* He considered himself bound to do so after being outvoted in the Cabinet on the question of recognising at once and unconditionally the independence of the United States. The majority, of which Lord Shelburne formed one, thought it better that the recognition should be made one of the conditions of peace. That the view of Fox was the more statesmanlike and the better fitted for promoting a good understanding with America cannot now be denied by any impartial investigator.

The choice of a successor to Lord Rockingham was a subject upon which the Whig party, already split up into sections, was to be again divided and weakened. Two men had almost irresistible claims to be acknowledged as heads of the party, the Duke of Richmond and Fox. To neither would the King have given his confidence. Fox told the Duke of Richmond, that as both of them were unacceptable on personal grounds, it was right that they should unite in acting under the leadership of the Duke of Portland. But the Earl of Shelburne would obey no superior, and in so acting, he had the King on his side. Knowing that to favour him would tend to disintegrate the Whig party, the earliest act of the King, after Lord Rockingham's death, was to appoint Lord Shelburne First Lord

* General Fitzpatrick's Journal, quoted in Memorials, vol. i., p. 435.

of the Treasury, an office which was accepted by him without the faintest manifestation of reluctance or the slightest doubt as to his capacity for filling it. If a statement made by Mr. Nicholls be accurate, Fox was not indisposed to acquiesce in the appointment of Lord Shelburne, however disinclined he might have been to hold office under him:—"Within three hours after the Marquess of Rockingham's death was known, a friend of mine called upon Charles Fox. The question which naturally occurred was 'who is to succeed Lord Rockingham as First Lord of the Treasury?' Mr. Fox replied, 'I think it must be the Earl of Shelburne: he is first oar, and I do not know how we can resist his claim.' But Mr. Burke had afterwards sufficient influence with Mr. Fox and the other leaders of the Rockingham party to prevail upon them to resist the appointment of the Earl of Shelburne." * In the end, Fox upheld the propriety of the Duke of Portland taking the place of Lord Rockingham, and the result was a division in the party, the Duke of Richmond, General Conway, and Lord Keppel remaining in the Cabinet of the Administration over which the Earl of Shelburne presided, while Fox and Lord John Cavendish resigned, being followed by Burke, Sheridan, and other colleagues in the Administration. As a compensation for this secession, a young Whig of great talents and greater pretensions, accepted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was William Pitt.

Lord Rockingham's second Administration was distinguished, according to Walpole, by "the masterly abilities of Charles Fox and the intrigues of

* Recollections of John Nicholls, M.P., vol. i., p. 49.

Lord Shelburne; the former displayed such facility in comprehending and executing all business as charmed all who approached him. No formal affectation delayed any service or screened ignorance. He seized at once the important points of every affair, and every affair was thence reduced within small compass—not to save himself trouble, for at once he gave himself up to the duties of his office. His good humour, frankness, and sincerity pleased, and yet inspired a respect which he took no other pains to attract. The Foreign Ministers were in admiration of him. They had found few who understood foreign affairs, or who attended to them, and no man who spoke French so well, or who could explain himself in so few words." *

The public thought the conduct of Fox inspired by pique against an individual, nor was it easy, by any explanations, to alter or efface this impression. Yet he really feared that the design of Lord Shelburne was to make the action of the Government subserve the personal wishes of the King, and thereby to restore the old, bad system of royal dictatorship. In proof of this, the third Lord Holland records a conversation which passed between William Pitt and Fox immediately after Lord Rockingham's death. Pitt expressed his regret to hear that the Government would be broken up. Fox replied that this would happen, and the "whole system be revised," adding, "they look to *you*: *without* you they cannot succeed; *with* you I know not whether they will or no." Pitt replied, "If they reckon upon *me*, they may find themselves mistaken." On leaving the House, Fox

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 542.

repeated these remarks to Lord John Townshend and Lord Maitland, who communicated them to Lord Holland, and he added, "I believe *they do* reckon on Pitt, and I believe they will *not* be mistaken." * Fox proved a soothsayer.

In explaining and justifying his resignation to the House, he dwelt with acerbity of phrase upon the conduct of the Ministers who had remained in office, saying that "they were men of that magnanimity of mind which was superior to the common feelings of humanity, for they thought nothing of promises which they had made; of engagements into which they had entered; of principles which they had maintained; of the system on which they had set out. They were men whom neither promises could bind, nor principles of honour could secure; they would abandon fifty principles for the sake of power, and forget fifty promises when they were no longer necessary to their ends." Of his own feelings, in resigning his post, he spoke in a candid and honourable strain:—"He was free to confess that he had not quitted his seat without a pang. He was not insensible to those distinctions which it gave him. He was neither incapable of vanity nor of ambition; he had the vanity to be pleased with the applause of the good and virtuous, and he had the ambition to be serviceable to his country. But there were considerations superior both to his vanity and his ambition—the considerations of duty and conscience; the duty which he owed to that House and to his country, of warning them of the danger which he saw approaching, and the conscience of reflecting that he had discharged his obligations

* Memorials, vol. i., pp. 446, 447.

with fidelity and firmness, and that, if his country was to be ruined by a renewal of that system which it had been the labour of years to demolish, he had at least the consolation of reflecting that it was not owing to him." *

Many of his friends were not sorry that he was again able to pass his leisure hours in their society. Mr. Hare, member for Knaresborough, and one of the wits of the day, congratulated him "on coming from the service of the King of England, once more to attend the King of Egypt," † an allusion to the fashionable game of Pharaoh or Faro, of which Fox was very fond. But he continued, in addition, to watch the conduct of Lord Shelburne's Ministry with vigilance, and to be on the alert to expose its shortcomings. It was a Ministry in which the several members were on bad terms with their chief. Lord Shelburne, although a man of acute mind and liberal views, had yet the vanity to think himself a second Chatham and fitted for acting the part of a second Sully. He flattered people in order to gain them, and he let it appear by his actions that his smooth words were sheer hypocrisy. His most audacious utterance was addressed to Lord Chancellor Thurlow, whom he told, "as a new discovery that he had just made, that he was amazed at the genius he had found in the King. . . . The Chancellor, instead of reporting the encomium to the King, as Shelburne expected, told it to everybody else with contempt." ‡ The King himself thought the nickname of the "Jesuit,"

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 75.
† Journal and Correspondence of Lord Auckland, vol. i., p. 15.
‡ Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 541.

by which he, in common with many others, designated Lord Shelburne, was perfectly appropriate; while Lord Shelburne complained to the end of his life of the manner in which the King had tricked and deceived him. Two important members of his Administration, the Earl of Carlisle and Lord Keppel, soon resigned, and the Duke of Richmond told the King that, owing to Lord Shelburne assuming too much power, he would cease attending the Cabinet Councils. Minor men were not less dissatisfied. Mr. George Rose, then Secretary to the Treasury, records:—"During that period, very little interesting to myself occurred, except the alternate violence and flattery of Lord Shelburne. . . . There were other qualities in his Lordship that were uncomfortable to me—a suspicion of almost every one he had intercourse with, a want of sincerity, and a habit of listening to every tale-bearer who would give him intelligence or news of any sort." *

The great work which devolved upon the Shelburne Administration was the conclusion of treaties of peace with the United States, Holland, France, and Spain. Fox left office before material progress had been made in the negotiations, but not before he had laid down the rules of action by which he was governed, and defined the objects for which he strove. It was his desire to act handsomely towards the United States, and persuade Franklin to assent to a separate peace; to negotiate separately with the other Powers, and to conclude alliances with the Empress of Russia and Frederick the Great, in order to be the better able to obtain honourable terms from Spain, France,

* Diaries and Correspondence of George Rose, vol. i., p. 28.

and Holland. The design was a grand and statesmanlike one; but it found no favour in the eyes of Lord Shelburne. He was satisfied to take what was offered to him, and the consequence was that, when the preliminaries of peace were published in this country, the cry of popular indignation was nearly as loud as that which arose when Lord Bute made the discreditable treaty of peace in 1763. Alarmed by the clamour, Lord Shelburne dreaded to meet Parliament without strengthening his Ministry, and with that object he sent his friends to make overtures both to Fox and Lord North. No arrangement was found practicable; accordingly, he was attacked by the combined forces of North and Fox. Being defeated in two important divisions, he resigned.

His Administration was succeeded by the Coalition which was the work of the friends of North and Fox, and not of the leaders themselves. Mr. George North and Mr. Eden, Mr. Adam, Lord John Townshend and Lord Loughborough, all laboured to bring about an alliance they considered required by the exigencies of public affairs, which many persons stigmatized as unnatural, and in fact was a gigantic and irretrievable political blunder. With the persons principally interested there was little trouble. Lord North unhesitatingly declared that he was "irreconcileable to no man;" Fox was ready to act with any one who would pledge himself to govern on constitutional principles, and would resist the undue exercise of the royal prerogative. His first public declaration on the subject constituted his defence. In the debate on the preliminary articles of peace on the 17th of February, 1783, he said in reply to

Ministerial taunts, "That I shall have the honour of concurring with the noble Lord in the blue ribbon [Lord North] on the present question, is very certain; and, if men of honour can meet on points of general national concern, I see no reason for calling such a meeting an unnatural junction. It is neither wise nor noble to keep up animosities for ever. It is neither just nor candid to keep up animosity when the cause of it is no more. It is not in my nature to bear malice, or to live in ill-will. My friendships are perpetual, but my enmities are not so." *

Lord Shelburne resigned on the 24th of February, and on the 2nd of April the Duke of Portland was appointed First Lord of the Treasury in the Coalition Ministry; the two Secretaries of State being Lord North and Fox. The long interval, during which the country had been deprived of a Government, was spent by the King in persistent but unavailing endeavours to avoid the necessity of restoring Fox to power. He appealed, in turn, to Lord Gower, Lord North, and William Pitt, to act as Premier and to form an Administration in which the Opposition should either not be represented at all, or else should have little influence. His antipathy to Fox, which had always been great and unreasoning, was rendered more intense and irrational owing to the friendship which existed between the distinguished commoner and the Prince of Wales. George the Third and Queen Charlotte detested their eldest son George, as strongly as George the Second and Queen Caroline did their eldest son Frederick. Like his grandfather, the Prince of Wales, ostensibly professed attachment

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 122.

to the party in Opposition. His contempt for his father was unconcealed, and his debaucheries were the talk of the town. He was worse than undutiful, for he made a point of insulting his father. On one occasion the Prince, his uncle, the Duke of Cumberland, and the King were hunting together, and having arrived at a place from which they desired to return home in a carriage, the Prince and his uncle entered the only vehicle in the town and drove off, leaving the King to shift for himself. Falsely attributing the disgraceful conduct of the Prince to the teaching of Fox, he actually consulted Lord Chancellor Thurlow and Lord Ashburton as to "what redress he could have against a man who alienated from him the affection of his son;" the Chancellor is said to have replied, "he would have no peace till his son and Fox were secured in the Tower." *

Fox is supposed to have insisted that neither Lord Thurlow nor Mr. Dundas should hold office in the Coalition Ministry. This condition was as obnoxious to the King as the demand of George Granville, on returning to office in 1765, that he should pledge himself to have no intercourse with Lord Bute, and should remove Mr. Stuart Mackenzie, Lord Bute's brother, from the office of Privy Seal for Scotland. Although the manner in which Lord Thurlow had conducted himself when Chancellor in the Rockingham Administration was a sufficient reason for desiring his exclusion from the new Ministry, yet it is not certain that Fox was personally indisposed to act with him. Lord Eldon, the intimate friend of Lord Thurlow, gives the following

* Last Journals of Horace Walpole, vol. ii., p. 599.

version of what occurred, a version differing from that given by Lord Holland and Horace Walpole, and credited by Earl Russell:—"Mr. Fox, much to Lord Thurlow's surprise, called at his house, and was shown into his drawing-room. Lord Thurlow, immediately that Mr. Fox's visit was announced, determined to receive him (observing, when he narrated the matter, that he did not wish that Mr. Fox should suppose him afraid to meet anyone), and an interview took place. Lord Thurlow, on being informed by Mr. Fox that he and his party wished the co-operation of his lordship, as Chancellor, in the Administration they wished to form, said, 'Mr. Fox, no man can deny that either you or Mr. Pitt are, beyond any two men that can be named, fit, from character and talents, to be at the head of any Administration; but, as Mr. Pitt is very acceptable to the King, and is in an extraordinary degree popular in the country, I have connected myself with him.'"* What makes it probable that the services of Lord Thurlow might not have been unwelcome is that the Coalition, not having agreed upon any other candidate for the Woolsack, had to put the Great Seal into Commission. By the King, the exclusion of Lord Thurlow was regarded as an intentional insult; yet, as the event proved, the ex-Chancellor was quite as able to serve his Majesty in overturning the Coalition Administration when a declared opponent, as he could have been had he acted the part of a traitor in the camp.

When the King found that resistance on his part was not only hopeless but perilous, he accepted the

* Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon, by Horace Twiss, vol. i., pp. 140, 141.

Coalition Ministry; but he resolved upon thwarting it in every posible way, and getting rid of it on the first pretext. He had the frankness to disclose his views and plans to those who were least likely to approve of that Ministry continuing in office, and who had hopes of succeeding to power on its removal. In a conversation with Mr. Wyndham Grenville, which was communicated to his brother, Lord Temple, afterwards known as Marquess of Buckingham, the nephew and successor of Earl Temple, the friend of Wilkes, the King said he thought the present situation "the most calamitous into which any country had ever been brought; that the kingdom was split into parties, not as had formerly been the case—two great bodies of men acting under the different denominations of Whigs and Tories, and upon different principles of conduct—but into factions, which had avowedly no other view than that of forcing themselves at all hazards into office." He poured out his indignation "upon Fox, whom he loaded with every expression of abhorrence; upon the Duke of Portland, against whom he was little less violent; upon Lord North, to whose conduct he imputed all the disasters of the country; upon American independence, which seems to have been a most bitter pill indeed." Mr. Wyndham Grenville adds that the King's object seems to be to set the members of the Coalition "quarrelling among themselves about the different parts of this arrangement." * Earl Temple, to whom this letter was addressed, was then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, an office to which he had been appointed by Lord Shel-

* Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. i., pp. 189, 192.

burne. He longed to ingratiate himself with the King, and he succeeded in doing so by writing a letter to him stating his objections to the Coalition, these objections being identical with those the King had communicated to Mr. Wyndham Grenville.

Hardly was the Coalition constituted, than a disruption seemed imminent. It had become necessary to arrange the household establishment of the Prince of Wales and determine his income. The Duke of Portland thought that the annual grant from Parliament should be £100,000; this was Fox's opinion also; but the King considered the sum extravagant; the proposition itself preposterous, and a proof that the Ministers were ready to sacrifice public interests to gratify an "ill-advised young man." He even contemplated entrusting Earl Temple, whose time-serving and flattery had rendered him acceptable at Court, with the formation of a new Administration. However, Earl Temple professed himself able to wait, and advised the King to forego his intention; and this, coupled with the Prince of Wales renouncing all claim to the sum demanded, averted a ministerial crisis. The King contributed £50,000 from his Civil List; surrendered the income from the Duchy of Cornwall of £12,000, which had wrongfully been withheld from the Prince, and approved of an application to Parliament for £30,000 to pay his debts.

On the 29th of August, Fox had the satisfaction of notifying to the Lord Mayor that the definitive treaties of peace with France, Spain, and America were to be signed on the 3rd of September. These treaties contained some advantageous modifications in the details of the preliminaries which Lord Shelburne had

agreed to; other concessions might have been gained, had not the King preferred taunting his Minister with having voted for the termination of the war, to aiding him in his efforts to procure the best terms of peace. In his demeanour, the King was "civil, but no more;" his passive resistance to the policy of his Ministers continued unbroken and most embarrassing. He peremptorily refused to grant a single peerage on their recommendation; hence their power was annihilated in one of its most important functions. Nor would they consent to purchase royal favour by the admission of Lord Thurlow into the Cabinet. His Lordship intimated to Fox that he was ready to accept the Great Seal, and to arrange as Chancellor for the removal of the royal veto upon the creation of new peerages. This offer, or rather bribe, was respectfully but firmly declined.

Parliament met early in November; on the 18th of that month, Fox introduced his East India Bill. The measure was imperatively required, for the state of British India, and the situation of the Company which ruled it, had become desperate. In the Government of India every vice, which is the offspring of unchecked authority and insatiable avarice, had grown rampant. Successive Governors had waged wars, dethroned princes, imposed taxes, and extorted contributions in order that they and their dependants might be enriched, and that the proprietors of East India stock might be propitiated with large dividends. The principles of upright administration were made subservient to the necessities of trade. To secure a profit was the first consideration: to show mercy and do justice the second.

Notwithstanding the unsparing exercise of force, and the employment of every means whereby money might be acquired, the finances of the Company were in a hopeless state, the deficit being estimated at ten millions sterling. The design of Fox was to disjoin the ruling from the trading function; to administer the country as a portion of the empire, and to conduct trade on behalf of the Company. In order to give effect to it, he proposed that seven commissioners, responsible to and appointed by Parliament, should rule over India, and that eight assistants should attend to matters of trade and commerce; to this scheme Pitt declared himself, at the outset, utterly opposed in principle and in detail. It involved, indeed, the abrogation of the Company's charter. To abrogate a charter was held to be an unpardonable interference with the sacred rights of property. All who were interested in the maintenance of chartered privileges were told by the opponents of the Bill that this measure was but the first attack of an unprincipled Coalition against what had been deemed inviolable, and that the author of the Bill was bent on the double villany of confiscating all the rights of the people and annihilating the power of the Crown.

Though duly informed of the scope of the measure itself, the King made no sign while the Bill was being hotly debated in the House of Commons and passing through the necessary stages with overwhelming majorities in its favour. His secret advisers were keenly alive to a possible danger should the Bill become law. It would have been a legislative achievement so vast and imposing as must have redounded to the credit of the Administration, greatly strengthened

their position, and made it almost impossible for the King to find a plausible pretext for their contemptuous dismissal. Hence these secret advisers, chief among whom were Lord Thurlow, Earl Temple, and Mr. Jenkinson, strenuously exerted themselves to make the King believe that his own authority would never afterwards prevail in anything should Fox prove victorious in this one matter. They assured the public that the object of Fox was to be absolute master in the India House; they assured the King that his aim was to usurp the crown. No calumny or any statement respecting this Minister was too gross and absurd for the King to accept and believe. He contemplated, if the Bill passed the House of Lords, to revive an obsolete prerogative and refuse his assent to it.

Earl Temple planned another and an equally unconstitutional course. Obtaining from the King a written statement to the effect that every peer who voted for the second reading of the measure should be regarded as a personal enemy, he canvassed for adverse votes, and succeeded so well, that, on a significant division preparatory to the second reading in the House of Lords, the opponents of the Bill were in a majority of eight. To many persons this result was as surprising as to others it was discreditable. Mr. Rose records having overheard Mr. Adam say to Mr. St. John, "I wish I were as sure of the kingdom of heaven, as I am of our carrying the bill this evening."*

By Fox himself, the final result, however unpalatable, was not unexpected. Between the division which virtually sealed the fate of the measure, and that on the second reading, when it was rejected by a majority of

* Diaries and Correspondence of George Rose, vol. i., p. 48.

nineteen, he quoted a saying which he had always admired for its boldness and propriety, a saying "uttered by the late George Grenville in experiencing a similar treachery—and would to God the same independent and manly sentiments had been inherited by all who bear the name!—'I will never again be at the head of a string of janissaries, who are always ready to strangle or despatch me on the least signal.'"* Neither was he unprepared to learn that he had ceased to be a Minister. Before the King sent an order to him and Lord North to deliver up the seals of office, he said in the House of Commons, "I did not come in by the fiat of majesty, though by this fiat I am not unwilling to go out. I ever stood, and wish only and always to stand, on public ground. I have too much pride ever to owe anything to secret influence. I trust in God this country has too much spirit not to spurn and punish the Minister that does! I arrogate no pomp, however, from the formality of resignation. My noble friend, I hope, thinks with me that the present is one of those singular junctures when it is necessary to act with caution as well as spirit. We are certainly agreed not to retain our places any longer than we can retain the dignity of Government with responsibility and effect, and to the constitutional mandate of dismission we are prepared to bow with humility and obedience." . . . "If, however, a change must take place, and a new Ministry is to be formed and supported, not by the confidence of this House or the public, but the sole authority of the Crown, I for one shall not envy the honourable gentlemen (Pitt) his situation. From that moment I put in my claim to a monopoly of Whig

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 273.

principles. The glorious cause of freedom, of independence, and of the Constitution is no longer his, but mine. In this I have lived; in this I will die. It has borne me up under every aspersion to which my character has been subjected. The resentments of the mean and the aversion of the great, the rancour of the vindictive and the subtlety of the base, the dereliction of friends and the efforts of enemies, have not all, diverted me from that line of conduct which has always struck me as the best. In the ardour of debate I may have been, like all other men, betrayed into expressions capable of misrepresentation; but the broad and open path of the Constitution has uniformly been mine. I never was the tool of any junto. I accepted of office at the obvious inclination of this House; I shall not hold it a moment after the least hint from them to resume a private station."*

Although the rejection of the obnoxious India Bill by the House of Lords was the ostensible ground for dismissing the Ministry, yet the character of the Bill itself had but little to do with the King's determination and action. He believed the assurances of his unconstitutional advisers that the measure was a bad one; but he was quite ready to act upon finding that the measure was unpopular. In encouraging clamour against the Bill under false pretences, Pitt acted unworthily as well as unfairly. His subsequent conduct evinced that he did not think the Bill so unacceptable and unworkable as he had striven to demonstrate. Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, who had been in the service of the East India Company, who was honestly opposed to the measure of Fox, who voted

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 272, 281.

against it and who regarded the declarations of Pitt as those of a far-seeing and upright statesman, was constrained to admit, after Pitt had introduced his own measure for the government of India, that "the two East India Bills differed more from each other in name than reality."* Fox himself put the matter in its true light when the East India Declaratory Bill was under debate on the 7th of March, 1788:— "It will be no longer clamoured through the country that I am the violater of chartered rights, or the usurper of the powers of the India Company. Had the right honourable member (Pitt) acted in the same open and fair way in 1783, all that abuse which I have sustained, all that clamour that has been excited, all that popular frenzy which disgraced the kingdom from one end of it to the other, never would have been provoked. He would then have said, 'You take away the Company's charter; there I am with you; the flagrant abuses the Company have made of it could not have been put an end to unless you did so. You suspend all their rights; there again I am with you; the suspension is necessary for their salvation. You assume the complete management and control of all the Company's affairs, civil and military, and the disposition and application of all their revenues; in all this you do right; such an assumption is requisite to give effect to your system! But you put these powers into the hand of a board of commissioners appointed by Parliament; there you do wrong; and there I am not with you. I contend that a board of control, appointed by the Crown, is the proper board to entrust all these powers with.' Upon that single point ought

* Posthumous Memoirs of Sir N. Wraxall, vol. iii., p. 34.

to have rested the whole dispute, for that is the only essential difference between the two bills."*

Although he confidently trusted that posterity would review the subject and give an unbiassed and favourable decision, yet the day of reparation arrived during his lifetime, and then, as he had predicted would occur, his India Bill was "regarded in its true light as a strong, but as a necessary and a just measure."†

The part performed by the King perfectly accorded with his character; that of Pitt is one which his uncompromising admirers estimate very differently from his impartial critics. The best excuse that can be urged for the sinister way in which he acted, is that he was ambitious, and ambition in a statesman, like what is called poetical license in composition, may be considered a valid reason for temporarily disregarding all the established rules. He enjoyed what to him was an abundant recompense; the discomfiture of a powerful opponent and the post of Prime Minister. Earl Temple, who, as a leading instrument in the plot, had a claim for some of the spoils of victory, was unable to profit by the success he had achieved; after undertaking to form an Administration, he relinquished the task. His retreat in the hour of triumph puzzled many contemporaries. The reason he gave, that of wishing to meet out of office the charges brought against him, was obviously insufficient. The fact was that, great though his reward appeared to be, it was yet far inferior to what he thought he deserved. It was his ambition then, as it was the aim of his long and peevish existence, to be made a Duke. To confer a dukedom on him, the King would not consent, at the

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 374. † Ibid., p. 372.

very moment he was desirous to see him acting as a Secretary of State, or the First Lord of the Treasury. In the Administration formed by Pitt his cousin, Earl Temple held no office.

The King's anxiety was as intense as his exertions were unremitting to get an Administration established, over which he would be actually supreme, and which should also be strong in Parliamentary support. When the prospect of constituting such a government was very doubtful he wrote to Mr. Pitt:—"On the edge of a precipice, every ray of hope affords some comfort. I have the utmost confidence that Lord Gower, Lord Thurlow, the Duke of Richmond, and Mr. Pitt will be able to fill up the several offices; if that however fails, you know my determination."*

The alternative here alluded to was that of retiring to Hanover and leaving this country, as he thought, to go to ruin in his absence, a threat he had more than once uttered during the discussions relative to Wilkes, and when Lord North was reluctant to prosecute the war with America. Thurlow told him that it was much easier to go away than to return; indeed, he would probably have found his journey to Hanover as impolitic as James the Second found his retirement to France. However, the King did not carry out his threat. William Pitt who had formed an Administration which was agreeable to his Majesty, though in a minority in the House of Commons, held his ground against the assaults of Fox till a dissolution occurred and the desponding minority was converted into a triumphant majority.

The Coalition Ministry, if judged by results, was a

* Diaries of George Rose, vol. i., p. 50.

failure; if by the nature and scope of its measures, it was a success. Yet as a political combination, it was highly discreditable to its promoters and advocates. The motives of Fox in becoming the colleague of Lord North were unquestionably pure. At his first interview with Lord North, prior to the agreement to unite with him, he enlarged on the necessity of carrying on the Government in such a way that the Ministers should be Parliamentary Ministers and not mere instruments of the King, as they had been in North's Administration, an arrangement which Fox regarded as wholly incompatible with constitutional government. His real objection to Lord Shelburne was a well-grounded suspicion that his lordship was as ready to defer to the King as Lord North had been. Mr. Nicholls relates that the members of the Coalition Ministry "came into office strongly impressed with the opinion they had formed of the King's character, viz., that nothing could induce him to relinquish the wish he had entertained of being his own Minister. I recollect the answer which Mr. Fox once made me when I put this question to him, 'whether it was not possible to conciliate the King?" he replied, 'No, it is impossible: no man can gain the King.'" * With the same readiness displayed in coalescing with Lord North, he was prepared to form a union with Pitt, if the latter would adopt the programme of a constitutional Minister. But Pitt preferred to retain power by making himself to a large extent in fact, as well as in form, the principal servant of his Majesty, and George the Third, astutely divining how well inclined Pitt was to act in the way Lord North had done for twelve

* Recollections of John Nicholls, M.P., vol. i., p. 390.

years, most cordially gave him his secret confidence and open support. To the public of his own day and to many superficial readers of the events of that time, the true grounds on which Fox based his alliance with Lord North escape observation. Nevertheless, the Coalition was a serious mistake. The Bishop of Llandaff, a prelate whose general liberality of sentiment, prior to the French Revolution, was only equalled by his common sense, pronounced this decisive verdict on the Coalition Ministry :—it "stamped on the heart of millions an impression which will never be effaced, that patriotism is a scandalous game played by public men for private ends, and frequently little better than a selfish struggle for power." *

Neither the speeches in Parliament, nor the opinions of the King on the India Bill, had more effect in discrediting the members of the Coalition in public estimation than the caricatures exhibited in the windows of the print-shops, and the nicknames which passed from mouth to mouth. Lord Thurlow thought it a clever party move to lay "a caricature of the Coalition on the table of the House of Lords." †

Lord Eldon repeats a saying of Fox that "Sayers's caricatures had done him more mischief than the debates in Parliament or the works of the press," and Eldon expresses his own belief that "the prints of Carlo Khan, Fox running away with the India House, Fox and Burke quitting paradise when turned out of office, and many other of these publications, had a vast

* Anecdotes of the Life of Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, vol. i., p. 172.

† Cunningham's edition of Horace Walpole's Letters, vol. viii., p. 444.

effect upon the public mind." * At this, as at earlier periods in our parliamentary history, nicknames had an enormous influence, and did the work of arguments in the minds of the vulgar. Sometimes, the nickname is condensed history. The flightiness and inconsistency of Bolingbroke were exemplified in his appellation "Gambol." Far less cleverness was displayed in designating Harley "Harlequin." Pulteney, who, according to Chesterfield, sank into insignificance and an earldom, was best known to the public, in the days of his ostentatious patriotic professions, as "Caleb" or "Squab." Sir Robert Walpole was commonly called "Robin Bluestring," or the "Large Macaw;" his foes often denounced him under the appellation of "Sir Robert Brass;" friends as often spoke of him with affection as "Robin" or plain "Bob." The elder Pitt affixed to George Grenville the name of the "Gentle Shepherd;" Pitt himself was the "Man Mountain," or "Quinbus Flustrin," and the "Great Commoner." The Duke of Cumberland was "Nolkejumskoi" when a blunderer, and the "Butcher" after he became infamous. The restless and intriguing Earl Temple, whom his wife addressed as her "dear Long Man," was addressed by the public as "Lord Gawky," and by the satirists as "Tiddy Doll." The Earl of Bute was in turn "Lothario," "The Thane," "Jackboot," and the "Boot." Lord Sandwich, for his treachery, was styled "Jemmy Twitcher." When Lord North spoke in a vaunting style about coercing the Americans, he was "Boreas;" when he proposed to replenish the Exchequer by taxing soap, he was the "Political Washerwoman" or "Soap-Suds." Edmund

* Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon, vol. i., p. 162.

Burke, being suspected by zealous Protestants of a leaning towards Roman Catholicism, was nicknamed "Ignatius Loyola." Lord Shelburne, whose craft and cunning were bywords, was the "Jesuit" or "Malagrida;" the latter epithet being associated with the blundering sarcasm of Oliver Goldsmith, who one day told his lordship that he could not understand why people called him Malagrida, for Malagrida was a very honest man. Lord Advocate Dundas, having uttered a horible threat and a new word in the House of Commons, was afterwards called "Starvation Dundas." In his youth, Fox was nicknamed "Niger," owing to his swarthy complexion, and the "Young Cub," owing to his name. His denunciation of the American war, and his advocacy of popular measures, caused him to be styled "The Man of the People," while at the period of the Coalition and the introduction of his India Bill, he was depicted as an Eastern potentate, who was prepared to act as a tyrant. With the nickname of "Carlo Khan," he was now engaged in a struggle with the "Button Maker" or "Farmer George" his King, and with "Master Billy," the "Virtuous Youth," the "Heaven-born Minister," or the "Pilot who weathered the Storm," his rival and head of the Government.

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IV.

RIVALRY WITH WILLIAM PITT.

At the General Election in March, 1784, the country decided on the question at issue between the Court and the champions of the Constitution. Seldom had political excitement been greater, or misrepresentation more general and effectual. Many old supporters of Fox had either become lukewarm, or else were converted into bitter foes. Some, who did not disapprove of his junction with Lord North, had questioned the propriety of introducing so sweeping a measure as the India Bill before his power was consolidated. A few men of the greatest capacity and the most comprehensive views were strong in their admiration of the moral courage he displayed in endeavouring, at all hazards, to remedy a national evil. Adam Smith was one of them. Praise from him is the highest eulogium that Fox could desire. That eminent man considered the "decisive judgment and resolution with which Mr. Fox has introduced and supported that bill does him the highest honour."* But every proprietor of East India stock, every dispenser of East India patronage, every candidate for employment in the East India Company's service, denounced Fox as a dangerous

* Journal and Correspondence of Lord Auckland, vol. i., p. 66.

fanatic, as an unscrupulous spoliator of vested interests, in the name of philanthropy, and for the furtherance of his own criminal ambition. Moreover, the discussion which lasted for nearly three months, during which he protested in no measured terms against the Government of the country being entrusted to a party in a minority in the House of Commons, and strove, not very wisely, to hinder Parliament being dissolved so long as that Government held office, had ended in the desertion of many persons from his side, partly because they thought him too imperious and violent, and chiefly because they perceived that he was the advocate of a doomed cause. While this struggle was pending, Dr. Johnson expressed a not uncommon feeling when he said to Boswell, "Fox is a most extraordinary man, who has divided the kingdom with Cæsar; so that it was a doubt whether the nation should be ruled by the sceptre of George the Third or the tongue of Fox." The ferment among politicians extended to private families. Walpole wrote to Sir Horace Mann:—"Politics are all in all. Little girls say, 'Pray, Miss, of which side are you?' I heard of one that said, 'Mamma cannot get papa over to our side."*

The decision of the country was unmistakeably adverse to Fox. Seats, which members of his party had held by a tenure regarded as absolutely secure, were lost by overwhelming majorities. Lord John Cavendish, who had been Chancellor of the Exchequer both in the Rockingham and the Coalition Ministries, was rejected by the freeholders

* Cunningham's Edition of Walpole's Letters, vol. viii., p. 465.

of Yorkshire. Mr. Scott, afterwards Lord Eldon, passing through Leominster, was able to procure the defeat of Sir Gilbert Elliot simply by telling the electors that Sir Gilbert would have been a Commissioner had the East India Bill become law. The Dissenters, whom Fox had ably served in Parliament, and who had looked on him as their most consistent and trusty friend, now turned against him and his followers. They leagued with the Court, which gloried in treating them harshly, against the man who had nobly taken their part, and they did so because they disliked his coalition with Lord North, and disapproved of his stout resistance to royal domination. Soon afterwards, repenting them of their foolish and ungrateful conduct, they preferred to their old champion a request for his support, and again received from him his generous and hearty advocacy. Yet the rout of the Opposition forces was so complete that, before the elections were over, and all "Fox's martyrs," as they were called, had received their political quietus, the King was able to inform George Rose with unfeigned pleasure that the results "seem on the whole more favourable than even the most zealous expected."

The personal defeat of Fox would have gratified the Court party more than that of any other member of the Opposition. Three candidates offered themselves for the two vacant seats in Westminster—Admiral Lord Hood, Fox, and Sir Cecil Wray; the latter, who had been at one time a fervent Whig, was now the favourite of the Court. The efforts of the courtiers and the Ministry to further the return of Admiral Hood and Sir Cecil Wray were unremitting and unscrupulous. At the contest in 1780, the sum of £8000 was drawn from the Civil

List to be used against Fox: on this occasion, there is no trustworthy record of the number of what the King called the "gold pills" lavished with the same object. The polling began on the 1st of April, and continued till the 18th of May. At first, the chances of Fox appeared desperate, and he despaired of his return. According to Walpole, "the Court sent 280 Guards to vote as householders at the Westminster election," which, he adds, "is legal, but which my father in the most quiet seasons would not have dared to do." *

On the side of Fox were two partisans whose personal influence was successfully employed in persuading voters to poll for him; the one was Samuel House, a respectable publican, the other was Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire. At his own cost, Samuel House entertained every voter who would support his favourite candidate, and, in those days of unlimited feasting at election-time, this was no small or unimportant aid.† The Duchess of Devonshire, who was devoted to the Whig party, canvassed with all the ardour which a woman displays when her heart is in a cause, and she did not hesitate to secure a doubtful voter with the irresistible bribe of a kiss. She was one of the most fascinating women of the day. Walpole, writing about her nine years previously, says that she "effaces all without being a beauty; but her youth, figure, flowing good nature, sense, and lively modesty, and modest famili-

* Cunningham's Edition of Walpole's Letters, vol. viii., p. 469.

† He died soon after the election. "On the last day of his life he expressed to his physician, Sir John Elliott, his earnest desire to see Mr. Fox, adding that he should then die contented. Sir John communicated the anxiety of his patient to Mr. Fox, who instantly waited upon him, and sat by his bedside for some time. From that moment the poor man declared himself to be perfectly resigned, and died in a few hours without a pang." Recollections by B. C. Walpole, p. 103.

arity, make her a phenomenon." * Madame d'Arblay thus depicts her seven years later:—"She was quite gay, easy, and charming: indeed, that last epithet might have been coined for her." † Writing to Wilberforce eight days after the election, Pitt says with a coarseness of insinuation which would have disgraced his least-educated supporter, "Westminster goes on well, in spite of the Duchess of Devonshire and the other women of the people." When the poll closed on the 18th of May, it was found that Fox had a majority over the Court candidate of two hundred and thirty-six. If fair play had prevailed, Hood and Fox would have been returned as the members for Westminster. But the beaten side was determined to resort to any stratagem, no matter how unusual or dastardly, rather than permit Fox to enter Parliament. The High Bailiff, Mr. Thomas Corbett, who was the reckless partisan of the Government, refused to make any return, on the ground that he had not finished a scrutiny. To Lord Hood personally, this mattered nothing, as he was absent from the country on active service. Yet it was rightly deemed an intolerable hardship that the electors of Westminster should remain without any representative in the new Parliament, because the King and Pitt were resolved that Fox should be hindered, if possible, from taking his seat in the House of Commons. Fortunately, the friends of the great Whig leader checkmated such a manœuvre, by procuring his return for the Kirkwall boroughs. This was made known to him before the result of the Westminster election was

* Walpole's Letters, vol. vi., p. 186.
† Madame d'Arblay's Diary, vol. v., p. 258.

announced, whereupon he made the following memorandum:—"Whether this is good or no I doubt, but all my friends think so, and I always think their judgment better than my own with respect to what regards *myself* in political matters." * Accordingly, he took his seat as a Scotch member. An attempt made by the Ministry to contest the validity of this election having entirely miscarried, he was enabled to argue in person the important case of the Westminster scrutiny.

During the first debate in the new Parliament, strong language was used by the Opposition respecting the conduct of the High Bailiff. Pitt formally espoused his part, and was able to carry the House with him, the majority having passed over from the Opposition to the Ministerial benches. When the subject was introduced again on the 8th of June, Fox spoke in the following terms of the scandalous way in which he had been aspersed and persecuted:—"Here I must notice the low, the little, the miserable allusions which are so frequently made, by those over against me, to the place that did me the honour of sending me to Parliament; but it is a poor and a spiteful kind of triumph. Much as they may affect to exult, nothing can be clearer than their disappointment on the occasion, and the petition lately presented against my seat for Kirkwall proves their mortification to a certainty. And, indeed, it appears from the conduct of Government that Scotland is the only place that could return me, as the same shameless persecution would, no doubt, have followed me in any other place in England. Fortunately there was one

* Memorials, vol. ii., p. 269.

part of the kingdom where their oppression could not prosper, and from which their violence and injustice could not exclude me." * In the course of this speech he turned to excellent account some murmurs with which he was interrupted at the outset, saying, "I have no reason to expect indulgence, nor do I know that I shall meet with bare justice in this House." This appeal was irresistible, and he obtained a most attentive hearing to a masterly exposition of his case, his speech being the most finished specimen of Parliamentary oratory ever delivered in this country. The course of the High Bailiff was alike unprecedented and unjustifiable. It could only be defended by one to whom nature had given the soul of a pettifogger, and who deliberately acted as a partisan. Whig lawyers like Mr. Lee, an ex-Solicitor-General, and Mr. Erskine declared the position of the High Bailiff to be untenable. Mr. Scott, a Tory among Tories, and a lawyer without a superior in the House, declared that the Constitution itself had been violated, and he voted against his party. But Sir Lloyd Kenyon, Master of the Rolls, had no hesitation in applauding and approving of the conduct of the High Bailiff in every particular. He was one of Pitt's supporters, and had purchased the right to represent in Parliament the rotten borough of Tregony in Cornwall. He had voted for Sir Cecil Wray; his qualification being doubtful, his vote was accepted with reluctance by his own party, the qualification itself consisting in his having slept for several nights in his stables, which were situated in Westminster, though his house was not, and thus, as the wits of

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 475.

the *Rolliad* phrased it, he voted "as the delegate of his coach-horses." Unreservedly adopting the petty technical quibbles of Sir Lloyd Kenyon, and animated with a determination to humiliate his great rival, Pitt intimated his thorough approval and admiration of all the High Bailiff's proceedings. That the course of Pitt was neither noble nor legal, is now admitted by those who admire him the most. His real motives do not require to be conjectured: they are avowed in a letter written by him on the 24th of May to the Duke of Rutland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland:—"I cannot let the messenger go without congratulating you on the prospect confirmed to us by the opening of the session. Our first battle was previous to the address on the subject of the return for Westminster. The enemy chose to put themselves on bad ground by moving that two members ought to have been returned, without first hearing the High Bailiff, to explain the reasons of his conduct. We beat them on this by 283 to 136. The High Bailiff is to attend to-day, and it will depend upon the circumstances stated whether he will be ordered to proceed in the scrutiny, or immediately to make a double return, which will bring the question before the Committee. In either case I have no doubt of Fox being thrown out, though in either case there must be great delay, inconvenience and expense, and the choice of the alternative is delicate."* The scrutiny did not proceed rapidly, despite a protest from Fox that, whatever the result, he, or the friends who might aid him with their purses, would suffer great pecuniary loss. A year elapsed, and it was still in progress. The House being again appealed

* Life of Pitt, by Earl Stanhope, vol. i., p. 213.

to, Pitt continuing inexorable, tried to silence his opponents by moving the previous question. Formerly, he had triumphed by a majority of 97: now, he was beaten by a majority of 38. On the following day, the return, which Pitt said the "enemy" had "put themselves on bad ground" in calling for, was made by the High Bailiff, and Fox took his seat as member for Westminster. Shortly afterwards, a jury gave him £2000 damages, which he distributed among the Westminster charities. It has never been alleged that the High Bailiff was the poorer for having paid this sum, or that any of the expenses caused by his illegal proceedings came out of his pocket. Discomfited in law and fact, and injured in public estimation by conduct which was not that of a magnanimous political rival, Pitt gained one victory even more discreditable than all his defeats. He successfully resisted Fox's motion to expunge the record of these shameful and unconstitutional transactions from the Journals of the House.

Fox's followers being now a minority in Parliament, he was forced to restrict himself to a policy of criticism. On the financial schemes of Pitt, he brought to bear an amount of special knowledge which surprised many of his opponents as much as it justified the warm allegiance of his supporters. Wraxall, who consistently voted with the Ministers, and who almost worshipped their able head, was unable to deny the financial shrewdness of the Opposition leader. Referring to the debate on the sinking fund in 1786, he says, "Fox impressed me, indeed, on that occasion, —as he did upon every other, when questions of finance were agitated and discussed in Parliament

during my time,—with a conviction that he possessed talents nearly, if not in every respect fully, equal to those of Pitt." * Opposing the Commercial Treaty with France, Fox gave utterance to the phrase, for which he has often been reproached, that "France was the natural political enemy of Great Britain." What he meant was that France, as a country ruled by the House of Bourbon, was the inveterate foe of this country. That he thought otherwise of France as a nation was proved by his readiness, when the Bourbons were deposed, to enter into the closest alliance with her, and for this he was villified by the very men who had formerly taunted him with being a malignant foe of the French. It has been overlooked that, when he objected to the Commercial Treaty with France for the reason just stated, he proposed an alternative which, while it did honour to his sagacity, did not render him the more acceptable to the King and his friends:—"He earnestly recommended, instead of the present treaty, a more intimate connection with America—such an intercourse for Britain that could be devised, and entirely consistent with her true political interests; and such an intercourse he had the best reasons for believing America was both willing and eager to enter into upon fair and equitable terms." A friendly understanding like this, if cemented while Washington was still alive and in power, would have been of infinitely greater service to both nations by rendering dangerous heartburnings impossible, than the treaties which could then have been concluded with any other nation upon earth. To a

* Posthumous Memoirs of his Own Times, by Sir N. Wraxall, vol. ii., p. 80.

commercial treaty with Ireland, Fox was also opposed; though his views on this head were tinctured with foolish delusions about protection to native industry, yet his chief objection was that the projected arrangement would unduly trench upon Irish independence. He opposed many of the taxes introduced by Pitt, and the shop tax in particular. This impost was most obnoxious to traders in all the large towns. It had afterwards to be repealed in consequence of their protests. By some electors of Westminster, Fox was warmly lauded on account of his supposed dislike to taxation. They even appear to have thought that the policy of their favourite representative implied the entire abolition of all taxes. Sheridan once told the House that some verses made upon Fox by one of his constituents were sung or repeated at their social gatherings, and that the following two lines "never failed to produce a torrent of applause:—

'Whenever a tax in the House was projected,
Great Fox he rose up and always objected.'" *

Certainly, his denunciation of the shop tax rendered him popular. Visiting Lord Derby at Knowsley, he was invited to a great banquet in his honour given by the inhabitants of Manchester, who had sent a petition, with 120,000 signatures, against this tax. A grand procession was formed to escort him into the town. He was assured that the inhabitants regretted their opposition to his India Bill, and sincerely repented their predilection for Pitt. The merchants of Liverpool entertained him with equal cordiality.

In the proceedings against Warren Hastings, he

* Sheridan's Speeches, vol. ii., p. 85.

supported Burke alike with his voice and his personal aid. His speeches, excellent of their kind, were not great oratorical displays, his exertions being chiefly devoted to the business of the trial. When his fellow-managers were divided in opinion, they deferred to his view and acted upon his decision. While ready to punish those who might be convicted of tyranny abroad, he was as ready to help those who were suffering for conscience sake at home. A motion being made for the repeal of the oppressive Test and Corporation Acts, he supported it with the utmost vigour, and merely said of the Dissenters, for whom he pleaded, and who had done their best to thwart him: "On recollection of what had been their conduct upon that occasion [the Coalition], the House would at least do him the justice to say that in supporting them that day he was not influenced by any very obvious motives of private partiality or attachment. Yet he was determined to let them know that, though they could upon some occasions lose sight of their principles of liberty, he would not upon any occasion lose sight of his principles of toleration." *

On the 9th of May, 1788, Mr. Wilberforce had intended to propose a measure for the abolition of the slave trade. The subject was first mooted in the House, without effect, by Mr. David Hartley, son of the metaphysician, and member for the town of which Wilberforce was a native. On this occasion, the member for Hull was unavoidably absent through illness. In his absence, Pitt proposed a resolution pledging the House to discuss the matter in the following session. He carefully refrained from giving

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 317.

any opinion for or against the traffic in negroes, and he took credit for his reticence. Fox had no such scruples. His mind was made up. When Wilberforce first announced his intention of bringing in a Bill "for the abolition of the slave trade, Mr. Fox went up to him, and told him he should certainly concur with him in that measure; that he had thoughts of bringing in such a Bill himself, but was very glad it was in so much better hands." * No speech could have been more hearty or more eloquent in denunciation of the accursed traffic than that now delivered by Fox. He had the courage to intimate and the sagacity to perceive, what many friends of the negro did not then appreciate, that half measures were folly and palliatives inadmissible, and intimated that "he had no scruple to declare at the outset, that his opinion of this momentous business was, that the slave trade ought not to be regulated but destroyed." † In a subsequent debate he reiterated these views with all the emphasis of conviction, saying, "With respect to a regulation of the slave trade, a detestation of its existence must naturally lead him to remark that he knew of no such thing as a regulation of robbery or a restriction of murder. There was no medium; the Legislature must either abolish the trade or avow their own criminality." ‡

In the summer of 1788, his health being impaired by his exertions in promoting the return of his friend Lord John Townshend to fill a vacancy in the representation of Westminster, he went for a lengthened tour on the Continent. He visited Lausanne, and

* Letter from Hannah More in her Memoirs, vol. ii., p. 81.
† Speeches, vol. iii., p. 390. ‡ Speeches, vol. iv., p. 16.

spent some days there with Gibbon. How he was received, and what impression he made, cannot be more appropriately stated than in the great historian's own words: "The Man of the People escaped from the tumult, the bloody tumult of the Westminster election, to the lakes and mountains of Switzerland, and I was informed that he was arrived at the *Lion d'Or*. I sent a compliment; he answered it in person, and settled at my house for the remainder of the day. I have eat, drank, and conversed and sat up all night with Fox in England; but it never has happened, perhaps it never can happen again, that I should enjoy him as I did that day, alone, from ten in the morning till ten at night. . . . Our conversation never flagged a moment; and he seemed thoroughly pleased with the place and with his company. We had little politics; though he gave me in a few words, such a character of Pitt, as one great man should give of another his rival: much of books, from my own, on which he flattered me very pleasantly, to Homer and the Arabian Nights; much about the country, my garden (which he understands far better than I do), and upon the whole I think he envies me, and would do so were he a Minister. The next morning I gave him a guide to walk him about the town and country, and invited some company to meet him at dinner. The following day he continued his journey to Berne and Zurich, and I have heard of him by various means. The people gaze on him as on a prodigy, but he shows little inclination to converse with them." * At Berne he saw Lavater, whose system of reading character in the physiognomy was

* Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works, vol i., pp. 282—3.

then as much in vogue as was the system of Gall and Spurzheim at a later period for reading character in the protuberances on the skull. What Lavater thought of the English statesman is curious enough to merit reproduction in a footnote.* Italy was the country in which Fox determined to make the longest stay, with a view, in addition to recruiting his health, to revisit the galleries of paintings; the art of painting being one which he loved, and in which he was a real connoisseur. He was at Bologna in November, when a courier came thither from England bearing a summons to return home without delay. Parliament was to meet on the 20th of that month. That the King had lost his reason was the ground on which Fox's attendance in Parliament was desired. During his homeward journey, he was erroneously informed that the event generally feared had actually come to pass, and that George the Third was no more.

On the 22nd of the preceding month Mr W. Grenville, the Paymaster of the Forces, sent to his brother, the Marquess of Buckingham, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, a letter marked "most secret," in which he said that the King was ill; that his illness began with a spasmodic attack in the stomach induced by remaining a whole day in wet stockings, and that "a part of the King's disorder is an agitation and flurry of spirits which hardly gives him any rest." † Two days after-

* "*Front.* Inépuisable: plus de richesse d'idées, et d'images, que je n'ai jamais vu peint sur *aucune physionomie au monde. Sourcils.* Superbes, regnants, dominants. *Nez.* Médiocre." *Les Yeux.* Remplis de génie, perçans, fascinants, magiques. *Les Joues.* Sensuels. *Bouche.* Pleine d'une volubilité surprenante et agréable; et le bas du visage doux, affable, sociable." Letter from Sir Ralph Payne to Sir R. M. Keith; in Romance of Diplomacy, vol. ii., p. 212.

† Memoirs of the Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. i., p. 429.

wards he held a levée in order to allay disquieting rumours, and this "was an effort beyond his strength." On the 5th of November, when seated at table with the Queen and his family, he suddenly became a raving madman. The consternation among courtiers and statesmen was unbounded; the former had no precedents for acting towards a lunatic sovereign; the latter were embarrassed how to carry on the Government when the head of the State had lost his reason. Though unexpected, yet the event was not unexampled. In the month of October, three hundred and thirty-five years previously, at a time when the public saw the first Lord Mayor's Show, a time memorable in English literature as that during which Caxton was qualifying himself to print *The Canterbury Tales*, and in English history as that in which the Duke of York was prosecuting his successful rebellion, King Henry the Sixth was bereft of his senses. His strong-minded Queen, Margaret of Anjou, took upon herself to discharge some of his functions, while the Duke of York, whom Parliament appointed Lord Protector of the Realm, governed the country. Still, nothing that had been done in the year 1453 was of much avail to those who had to provide for the emergency of 1788. The differences of opinion and aim as to the course to be taken, and the manner in which it should be followed, were endless and pedantic.

When Parliament met on the 20th of November, an adjournment was agreed to, partly in order that the physicians should be consulted as to the King's condition, partly that Fox might be present and give his opinion. Travelling incessantly, he arrived in London from Bologna after a fatiguing journey of

nine days. When he entered the House on the 4th of December, his personal appearance, according to Wraxall, "excited a great and general sensation. I never saw Fox, either previously or subsequently, exhibit so broken and shattered an aspect. His body seemed to be emaciated, his countenance sallow and sickly, his eyes swollen; while his stockings hung upon his legs, and he rather dragged himself along, than walked up the floor to take his seat."* On the 10th, Pitt made the utterly superfluous, though thoroughly characteristic, proposal that a committee should be appointed to search for precedents. Fox objected, alleging, with perfect truth, that no exact precedent existed, and adding, with a rashness hardly to be excused, that "the circumstances to be provided for did not depend upon their deliberations as a House of Parliament; it rested elsewhere. There was then a person in the kingdom different from any other person that any existing precedents could refer to—an heir-apparent of full age and capacity to exercise the royal power."† This doctrine, which Fox afterwards qualified in such a way as to separate and distinguish it from the high Tory doctrine of Divine Right, was mistaken and ill-timed enough to give Pitt a momentary victory over his rival as a professor of Liberal opinions. Pitt boldly maintained that no person in the kingdom had any prior and superior right to the Regency. This view, as extreme on the one side as the original declaration of his rival was on the other, he modified afterwards by admitting the superior claim of the Prince of Wales. According to Pitt, the assembly

* Posthumous Memoirs of Sir N. Wraxall, vol. iii., p. 194.
† Speeches, vol. iii., p. 400.

in which he and his rival were debating was "something more than a Convention, and something less than a Parliament,"* which had met in an emergency, like that occasioned by the flight of James the Second, to represent and act for the whole body of the people. But his actuating principle is disclosed in the letters of his friend and colleague Mr. Wyndham Grenville to the Marquess of Buckingham. He apprehended that the accession of the Prince of Wales to power would be followed by immediate removal from office, and by ostracism from power in the future. Fox anticipated that the Prince of Wales would entrust the Whigs with the government of the country. It might have happened that the fears of Pitt were vain, and the hopes of Fox delusive. The Prince professed to have a liking for the Whigs, just as he would have professed Toryism had he thought that he could gain anything by so doing, and at the same time grieve his parents. As Prince Regent in 1789, he would probably have acted as he did in 1811, enjoying what to him was the paramount pleasure of mortifying and betraying those who had proved his friends. Both Fox and Pitt are chargeable with thinking too much of themselves and their party at a period when these ought to have been secondary considerations. While the time of the House was wasted in unprofitable controversy, Fox made the following pungent comment on the views enunciated respecting hereditary monarchy:—"If the doctrine of that day prevailed, the answer must be, 'I cannot tell, ask his Majesty's physicians.' When the King of England is in good health, the monarchy is hereditary; but when

* Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. ii., p. 76.

he is ill, and incapable of exercising the sovereign authority, it is elective."*

Though Pitt was not actuated by disinterested motives, yet the principle he upheld is highly to be commended. It was a vindication of the right of the people to have a voice in the appointment of their sovereign. Many of the speeches then made contain statements and maxims which ought not to be forgotten, and it is a fortunate precedent that the high Tories and the less thorough-going Liberals were most strenuous in supporting the extreme popular side. As a supplement to the declarations of Pitt, the following declaration of Lord Shelburne is noteworthy :—"I contend, therefore, that the hereditary succession cannot be considered as a right. In cases of exigence, they [the two Houses] have always been termed the Legislature, in order to prevent the greatest of all possible evils, a disputed succession." †

Pitt was perfectly successful. Resolutions proposed by him, on which was founded a Bill conferring the Regency on the Prince of Wales with certain restrictions, were passed by both Houses, and it was agreed that the Lord Chancellor should act as a constitutional ghost and affix the Great Seal to the Bill, notwithstanding the Sovereign's incapacity to intimate his sanction. The three months which these proceedings occupied, constituted the term of the King's attack, and just as his son was about to be invested with the Regency, George the Third became capable of resuming his duties as Sovereign. The Archbishop of Canter-

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 423.
† Posthumous Memoirs of Sir N. Wraxall, vol. iii., p. 241.

bury and the Lord Chancellor had an interview with him and found that he was again as sensible as ever. This meeting resembled that which the Bishop of Winchester and the Prior of St. John's had with Henry the Sixth at Christmas 1454, whereat, in the words of a contemporary, the King "spake to them as well as ever he did, and when they came out they wept for joy." * Before George the Third's recovery was announced and confirmed, Lord Chancellor Thurlow having learned that it was probable, renounced his intention of conciliating the leaders of the Opposition with a view to retaining the seals in a Whig Ministry. The speech in which he intimated his fidelity to the Sovereign closed with words which have become memorable for what they expressed and from the comments they evoked:—"When I forget my King, may my God forget me." † They were reported to the King, who heard them with joy. So deep was the impression, that meeting Mrs. Cunningham, one of Thurlow's natural daughters, at Weymouth, in 1804, he told her, "he should never have out of his mind his lordship's solemn declaration, 'that if ever he should forget his King, he trusted God, in such case, shall forget him.'" ‡ Despite, or in consequence of his mental shortcomings, George the Third had an extraordinary admiration and a retentive memory for things which flattered him.

The death or permanent incapacity of the King having been counted upon by the Opposition as a certainty, his recovery took them by surprise; they questioned its completeness, and they doubted whether

* The Paston Letters, Letter Sixteenth, vol. i., p. 81.
† See p. 137.
‡ Diaries of George Rose, vol. ii., p. 167.

it would be lasting. During his father's illness, the Prince of Wales behaved with an indecency almost incredible. He gave entertainments, at which toasts were drunk in anticipation of his soon attaining a higher position. More shameless still was the introduction of his friend Lord Lothian into the King's bed-room in order that he might listen to his ravings.* Public opinion as to the conduct of the royal offspring was mirrored in articles in *The Times*, charging the Dukes of York, Gloucester, and Cumberland with insincerity when expressing gratification at the King's recovery. These articles were pronounced libellous. For publishing them, Mr. Walter was sentenced to pay a fine of £50, to stand in the pillory at Charing Cross, to a year's imprisonment in Newgate, and to find security for good behaviour for seven years. Two months later he was brought from Newgate, and fined £200 for a libel on the Duke of Clarence and the Prince of Wales. In awarding punishment, the administrators of the law probably acted on the maxim, the greater the truth, the greater the libel.

Hardly had the King recovered completely, and the holders of official posts, who had taken part with the Opposition, been punished by dismissal, than the country was agitated with the tidings of a revolution in France; the substitution of the National Assembly for the Three Estates; the capture and destruction of the Bastille; the abolition of feudal rights and aristocratic privileges; the conversion of the old provinces into departments; the introduction of a representative system, and the establishment of trial by jury. By sanguine persons, these sweeping changes

* Courts and Cabinets of George III., vol. ii., p. 12.

were hailed as the bounteous first fruits of a political millennium; the timid majority regarded them, with terror and dismay, as the baleful precursors of a political chaos. Fox made no secret of his gratification at the overthrow of the old and arbitrary monarchical system of the House of Bourbon. When the army estimates were introduced, on the 5th of February, 1790, he intimated that "he had never thought it expedient to make the internal circumstances of other nations the subject of much conversation in that House; but if there ever could be a period in which he should be less jealous of an increase of the army, from any danger to be apprehended to the Constitution, the present was that period. The example of a neighbouring nation had proved that former imputations on armies were unfounded calumnies, and that it was now universally known throughout all Europe that a man by becoming a soldier did not cease to be a citizen. . . . The new form which the Government of France was likely to assume, he was persuaded, would render her a better neighbour, and less disposed to hostility, than when she was subject to the cabal and intrigues of ambitious and interested statesmen." * Four days afterwards, he urged that the army should be reduced, lamenting "that it was the nature of kings, ministers, generals, and those of a similar description, to oppose the reduction of the army." Burke expressed himself in favour of a reduced peace establishment for opposite reasons; he considered France as "a political light expunged out of the system of Europe," and denounced the "mad declaration of rights." This was the first public

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 33.

manifestation of fundamental differences in opinion between two men whose long political union and close personal friendship soon afterwards ended for ever.

The excitement among a large section of the public took the form of an apprehension that the Church was in danger. Thus, when Fox moved the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts on the 2nd of May, 1795, the majority against the motion had risen from 20 to 189. In the course of his speech, he vindicated the Dissenters from the reproach of disloyalty, and enumerated their services to the Crown during the rebellions of 1715 and 1745, when, not pleading their incapacity, but freely drawing their swords, they nobly transgressed the laws which proscribed them, and successfully fought the battles of our free constitution:—"For this gallant behaviour all the retribution they ever obtained was an Act of Indemnity, a pardon for doing their duty as good citizens, in rescuing their country in the hour of danger and distress." He expressed his expectation that, for the part he had that day taken, "the tongue of slander might possibly represent him as another Oliver Cromwell attacking the Church: he had been compared to that usurper on a former occasion, as attacking the Crown, even by the very men whose cause he was now pleading." Contrasting the rioters of 1780 with those who were now inciting to riot, he said:—"The mob then were illiberally insisting upon a repeal of a good law: the members of the Established Church were now as illiberally objecting to the repeal of a bad law. All unprincipled mobs he should ever regard with extreme horror and indignation; their cry was still the same, whether they were peasants, gentlemen, or bishops

Ignorance, prejudice, or fanaticism were their general topics of declamation. From the violence of their rage the God of peace and order ever preserve us!" *

Excesses from which Fox prayed to be delivered, were indulged in to the detriment of Dr. Priestley, whom he had styled "a truly eminent and learned gentleman," and of whom he asserted that in the "manly declaration of his individual opinion, expressive of his dislike of Establishments, he saw no criminality whatever." A Birmingham mob thought otherwise, and to shouts of "Church and King!' sacked the houses of Dr. Priestley and many other Dissenters, destroyed several chapels, and displayed their savagery, unchecked by the authorities, during four successive days. When the King heard of these dastardly outrages, he wrote:—"As the mischief did occur, it was impossible not to feel pleased at its having fallen on Priestley rather than another, that he might *feel* the wickedness of the doctrines of democracy which he was propagating." The foregoing remark may be contrasted with that of Wilkes:—"I am shocked to read of the savage, cruel, and persecuting spirit of the mechanics at Birmingham; and I trust that Government will exert itself in the punishment of so vile and wicked a crew." †

In the course of 1791, this country was on the verge of embarking in a war for the purpose of compelling Russia to restore the fortress of Oczakow to the Turks. Against this project, Fox entered an emphatic protest. He was not alarmed at the advance of Russia. "Overturning the Ottoman Empire he conceived to be an

* Speeches, vol. iv., pp. 61, 69, 75.
† Letters addressed by John Wilkes to his Daughter, vol. iii., p. 88.

argument of no weight. The event was not probable; and if it should happen, it was more likely to be of advantage than injurious to us." * Had he lived in our day, he might not have approved of that Quixotic Crimean campaign undertaken for the defence of Turkey, which demonstrated to the world, at the cost of one hundred millions sterling, that statesmen and generals sometimes blundered, and that English soldiers were still incomparable. In the course of this speech, he gave utterance to the declaration, which widened the breach between himself and Burke, that "he for one admired the new Constitution of France, considered altogether, as the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time or country." † Three weeks later, when the Quebec Bill was under discussion, Burke, referring to the French Revolution, intimated that he could be no friend to any one who approved of it. Fox made a pathetic appeal to his old comrade not to suffer political differences of view to interrupt private affection; reminded him that, "during the American war, they had together rejoiced at the successes of a Washington, and sympathised almost in tears for the fall of a Montgomery;" and declared that "from his right honourable friend he had learned that the revolt of a whole people could never be countenanced and encouraged, but must have been provoked." ‡ The tears with which Fox enforced his

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 198.

† In his "Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," Burke gives a slightly different version of the above sentence:—"He for one admired the new Constitution, considered altogether, as the most glorious fabric ever raised by human integrity since the creation of man."

‡ Speeches, vol. iv., p. 217.

appeal had no softening effect upon Burke; and the two men who, during twenty years, had led a party and fashioned its policy, who together exhibited a combination of talents alike splendid and most rare, became, from this time to the close of their lives, the brilliant exponents of antagonistic opinions, Burke maintaining that France ought to be governed by an absolute monarchy, Fox maintaining that France ought to be ruled in accordance with the wishes of her people.

A few days after this distressing episode, he had the satisfaction of receiving an instalment of that justice for his India Bill which he hoped one day to obtain. One of the reasons he assigned in support of the measure was that the East India Company was bankrupt; this allegation the Company most solemnly denied, and his opponents treated it as a pure invention, or an inexcusable exaggeration of his own. When Mr. Dundas introduced the India Budget on the 24th of May, he told the House that, "in the month of December, 1783, when he moved his celebrated East India Bill, Mr. Fox estimated the debts of the Company at nearly ten millions, while the Company themselves rated them at only four millions; but, in truth, before the year 1785, they actually did rise above ten millions." This tardy yet triumphant vindication of statements which had been rancorously impugned, was doubly gratifying at a time when his ardent sympathy with the French had rendered him unpopular again.

The nation was panic-stricken lest French principles should become endemic, these principles being regarded as a new contagious disorder, against the introduction of which a rigorous quarantine was but

an imperfect preservative, and the inexorable destruction of all who were attacked the only efficient safeguard. There was violent agitation; real grievances abounded; hot-headed men were only too ready to incite the people who felt aggrieved and angry to take the law into their own hands. The Ministers, if they did not foment the prevailing alarm, were resolved upon silencing the expression of opinion, sealing all mouths, and then declaring that contentment was universal. Such was the policy which dictated the passing of the Traitorous Correspondence Act, the Seditious Practices Act, and the repeal of the *Habeas Corpus* Act, which put Hardy and Horne Tooke on their trials for high treason, which sent Muir and Palmer to languish as felons at Botany Bay. All this was a practical satire upon the declaration of Pitt, when introducing his budget on the 17th of February, 1792, that there "never was a period when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably anticipate a durable peace than at the present moment."

While the oldest friends of Fox differed with him and deserted to the Ministry, while public execration was manifested in handbills circulated near his house, containing the words "Destruction to Fox and all the Jacobin crew," and while he foreboded, as he told Parliament, that "the people may treat his house as they have done that of Dr. Priestley," he never ceased to uphold the glorious cause of freedom of speech and of the Press, and, almost alone amidst a bewildered nation, he retained his self-command and clearness of vision. He did not engage in mere carping criticism upon the measures proposed, or vague denunciations

of the system pursued; he had his own scheme for meeting the emergency; a policy deliberately chosen and openly avowed. Here it is in his own words, spoken on the 13th of December, 1792; and never were more statesmanlike words uttered in the House of Commons:—"But it may be asked what would I propose to do in times of agitation like the present? I will answer openly. If there is a tendency in the Dissenters to discontent, because they conceive themselves to be unjustly suspected and cruelly calumniated, what would I do? I would instantly repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, and take from them, by such a step, all cause of complaint. If there were any persons tinctured with a Republican spirit because they thought the representative government was more perfect in a Republic, I would endeavour to amend the representation of the Commons, and to show that the House of Commons, though not chosen by all, should have no other interest than to prove itself the representative of all. If there were men dissatisfied in Scotland or Ireland, or elsewhere, on account of disabilities and exemptions, of unjust prejudices and cruel restrictions, I would repeal the penal statutes, which are a disgrace to our law books. If there were other complaints of grievances, I would redress them where they were really proved; but, above all, I would constantly, cheerfully, patiently listen. I would make it known that if any man felt, or thought he felt, a grievance, he might come freely to the bar of this House, and bring his proof, and it should be made manifest to all the world that where they did exist they would be redressed; where they did not, that it should be made evident. If I were to issue a pro-

clamation, this should be my proclamation:—'If any man has a grievance let him bring it to the bar of the Commons' House of Parliament, with the firm persuasion of having it honestly investigated.'" *

Although his power in Parliament declined from the time that men's minds were frenzied with false alarms concerning the influence on this country of the Revolution in France, yet he was able to carry one measure of undoubted utility and of real reform. This was the Libel Bill which is honourably and inseparably associated with his name. In the numerous prosecutions for libels, great injustice had often been perpetrated owing to the ruling of the Courts of Common Law, that, in finding their verdicts, juries were to consider solely the facts of printing and publishing, leaving it to the Court to determine how far the incriminated matter was libellous in law. Many eminent counsel had maintained that a jury was entitled to pronounce a verdict upon the entire issue, and to determine, not merely whether a particular work had been published, but whether the work itself was a libel. Erskine urged this view with all his eloquence and acuteness; but the opposition of the Judges was too strong for him. To remedy what he deemed a defect in legal procedure, Fox framed and introduced his Libel Bill and supported it in a speech of great power. The most interesting passage in this speech is that relating to the Press. He said that "he need not take up the time of the House with any general declamation on the subject of the liberty of the Press. Whoever saw what the world was now and compared it with what it formerly had been, must be

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 459.

sensible that it had greatly improved in the science of government, and that that improvement was entirely owing to the liberty of the Press. . . . . If even the just liberty of the Press were transgressed, he should be an enemy to a severe punishment being inflicted after the crime was committed. He was also an enemy of all previous restraints on the Press, because he thought he could prove that in all countries, and at all times, previous restraints on the Press had the effect of restraining the just liberty of the people, and had never been able to prevent the mischiefs arising from its licentiousness."* These opinions, which are incontestably sound, were far in advance of the age in which they were expressed, and they are still, after the lapse of nearly a century, far in advance of those prevailing in more than one great European country. The Bill itself, though it passed through the House of Commons, was yet rejected in the House of Lords. Being introduced again in the following year, it then became law despite the energetic opposition of Lord Chancellor Thurlow and Lord Chief Justice Kenyon. The latter predicted that such a measure would "prove the confusion and destruction of the law of England." The Marquess of Lansdowne powerfully supported it. He assured the House that it was necessary to check the increasing power of the Judges, adding, "if God Almighty, in his mercy, were to send among us another Locke, or another Montesquieu, he doubted not but they would be deemed libellers."

Overtures were made to Fox in 1792, to unite with Pitt in forming a strong Administration on an extended basis. A general agreement prevailed between the two

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 246.

statesmen on the questions of Parliamentary Reform, Abolition of the Slave Trade, Repeal of the Test Acts, and the policy to be adopted towards France. When there was a clear prospect of such a settlement being made as would assuredly have proved of incalculable benefit to the country, Burke and some of Pitt's friends, believing that no government of which Fox was a member would embark in a crusade to reverse the French Revolution and restore feudalism and unlimited monarchy in France, or would strive to establish arbitrary authority in Great Britain, interposed and terminated the negotiations. Instead of a new government being constituted on a broad and rational foundation, the existing Ministry was remodelled by the accession of Lord Loughborough, the Duke of Portland, Lord Fitzwilliam, and Mr. Windham, all whom were seceders from Fox's party. Minor men followed their lead, and Fox was left at the head of a small, but devoted band of forty. If enthusiasm, energy, and the profession of genuine constitutional principles could have counterbalanced numerical inferiority, this little party ought to have had the ascendency on every division. Lord Thurlow said in his usual pithy style :—"There are but forty of them, but there is not one of them who is not ready to be hanged for Fox."

The Whig seceders were appropriately nicknamed "Alarmists." Their defection made no change in Fox's conduct, and drew from him but little comment. This was the tone he used :—"The operation of fear was not easily calculated, when they saw already that it had made a Chancellor [Loughborough]. To his honourable friend [Windham] it had produced only reputation. He was now enrolled as one of the very first

men in the country, not for those virtues and abilities that well entitled him to the rank, but for his quick sense of alarm, and his perseverance in dismay. When fear could thus confer both profit and reputation, there was no saying to what men might aspire by this glorious kind of magnanimous timidity." *

Fox's parliamentary career was now occupied in inculcating with heartfelt zeal, but without any immediate effect, the necessity for treating the people of England with lenity and the people of France with moderation. As he had protested against rashly embarking in war, so he protested as vigorously against carrying on hostilities without a plan and without principle. He ridiculed the absurdity, and exposed the hypocrisy of the crusade against the French, pointing out that, while the Emperor of Germany was professedly siding with the House of Bourbon, he was acquiring towns in Alsace in the name of the King of Hungary, while we, though nominally aiding the House of Bourbon, were capturing Valenciennes in the name of the Emperor of Germany, proclaiming the Constitution of 1791 at Toulon, and taking possession of the French colony of Martinique in the name of the King of Great Britain. His most difficult task was to defend the British Constitution from the attacks of insidious or declared opponents. The first principles of our free Government had to be expounded afresh. One passage in a speech by him exhibits his constitutional views in a condensed yet luminous form, and great indeed must have been the danger to liberty and the ignorance of its true conditions when he had to address such words as the following to a British

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 62.

House of Commons:—"Even against so great an authority [as Mr. Burke] he must say that the people are the sovereign in every State; that they have a right to change the form of their government, and a right to cashier their governors for misconduct, as the people of this country cashiered James II., not by a Parliament, or any regular form known to the Constitution, but by a Convention speaking the sense of the people. That Convention produced a Parliament and a King. They elected William to a vacant throne, not only setting aside James, whom they had justly cashiered for misconduct, but his innocent son. Again, they elected the House of Brunswick, not individually, but by dynasty; and that dynasty to continue while the terms and conditions on which it was elected were fulfilled, and no longer. He could not admit the right to do all this but by acknowledging the sovereignty of the people as paramount to all other laws. But it was said that, although we had once exercised this power, we had in the very act of exercising it renounced it for ever. We had neither renounced it, nor, if we had been so disposed, was such a renunciation in our power. We elected first an individual, then a dynasty, and lastly passed an Act of Parliament in the reign of Queen Anne, declaring it to be the right of the people of this realm to do so again without even assigning a reason. If there were any persons among us who doubted the superior wisdom of our monarchical form of government, their error was owing to those who changed its strong and irrefragable foundation in the right and choice of the people, to a mere flimsy ground of title."*

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 23.

Noteworthy, during this long period of barren protests against folly and fanaticism, was a panegyric which he pronounced in Parliament on Washington, whom he lauded as an "illustrious man, deriving honour less from the splendour of his situation than from the dignity of his mind, before whom all borrowed greatness sinks into insignificance, and all the potentates of Europe (excepting the members of our own royal family) become little and contemptible. He has had no occasion to have recourse to any tricks of policy or arts of alarm; his authority has been sufficiently supported by the same means by which it was acquired, and his conduct has uniformly been characterized by wisdom, moderation, and firmness. . . . I cannot, indeed, help admiring the wisdom and the fortune of this great man: by the phrase 'fortune' I mean not in the smallest degree to derogate from his merit. But, notwithstanding his extraordinary talents and exalted integrity, it must be considered as singularly fortunate that he should have experienced a lot which so seldom falls to the portion of humanity, and have passed through such a variety of scenes without stain and without reproach. It must, indeed, create astonishment that, placed in circumstances so critical, and filling for a series of years a station so conspicuous, his character should never once have been called in question; that he should in no one instance have been accused either of improper insolence or of mean submission in his transactions with foreign nations. For him it has been reserved to run the race of glory without experiencing the smallest interruption to the brilliancy of his career."* The people of the United

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 172.

States, though predisposed to think that uncomplimentary things respecting them are systematically uttered in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, may not be displeased to learn that Fox delivered in the House of Commons such an apostrophe as the following:—"Happy Americans! while the whirlwind spreads desolation over one quarter of the globe, you remain protected from its baneful effects by your own virtues and the wisdom of your Government! Separated from Europe by an immense ocean, you feel not the effects of those prejudices and passions which convert the boasted seats of civilization into scenes of horror and bloodshed. You profit by the folly and madness of contending nations, and afford, in your more congenial clime, an asylum to those blessings and virtues which they wantonly contemn or wickedly exclude from their bosom. Cultivating the arts of peace under the influence of freedom, you advance by rapid strides to opulence and distinction; and if, by any accident, you should be compelled to take part in the present unhappy contest—if you should find it necessary to avenge insult or repel injury, the world will bear witness to the equity of your sentiments and the moderation of your views; and the success of your arms will, no doubt, be proportioned to the justice of your cause." *

The most vigorous stand ever made by him against the reactionary measures of the Court was when, in 1795, Bills were introduced to accelerate the conviction and facilitate the punishment of those charged with treason and sedition. The measures were conceived in the foolish and narrow-minded spirit which

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 173.

would repress crimes by multiplying the occasions on which they might be committed, would stifle discontent by making public meetings illegal and the expression of opinion an offence. Such a policy was supposed, by many persons accounted wise, to be the most appropriate for times of agitation. The Bishop of Rochester said in the House of Lords that the mass of the people had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them; this maxim inspired the legislation of the opponents of liberty. When these abominable projects were propounded, Fox exclaimed with righteous indignation and unanswerable logic:—"To proceed thus in order to prevent popular tumults appears to me to be the most desperate infatuation. Good God! Sir! we have seen and have heard of revolutions in different states. Were they owing to the freedom of popular opinions? Were they owing to the facility of popular meetings? No, Sir; they were owing to the reverse of this, and therefore I say, if we wish to avoid the danger of such revolutions, we should put ourselves in a state as different from them as possible. What are we now doing?—putting ourselves in a condition nearly resembling the periods when these revolutions happened."

In the course of another speech on the same subject, he made the following declaration, which many interpreted as treasonable, but which, whatever its character, was amply justified by the provocation:—"If, however, Ministers so resolute in their spirit of destruction were determined, by means of the corrupt influence they possessed in the two Houses of Parliament, to pass the bills in violent opposition to the declared sense of a great majority of the nation, and they should be put

in force with all their rigorous provisions, if his opinion were asked by the people as to their obedience, he should tell them that it was no longer a question of moral obligation and duty, but of prudence."* He knew that his words were liable to misconstruction, and that the Ministers were adepts in the arts of misrepresentation; but he felt it his duty as a public man not to shrink in the time of danger from using strong language, even though it might be misconstrued or misrepresented. These expressions were treated as he had foreseen, and he had to recall to the House that what he said was uttered "as an advice to the governors, not an incentive to the governed." Yet he had to submit to the charge of fomenting a revolution, and to hear many doleful predictions as to what would happen should the poorer class gain the mastery. Referring to what Sir William Grant said on this head, Fox assured the House he "had only brought to his mind what had seldom been absent from it for many years. If ever the persons who wish to destroy the Constitution of this country, as was done in the French Revolution, by rapine and plunder, should become a triumphant party here, though I may not be the first, I am well convinced that I shall not be the last, object of popular fury."† What chiefly influenced him in opposing these Bills was not only their restrictive and oppressive character, but the circumstance that they were merely a revival of some of the worse Acts passed in the reign of Charles the Second, and he drew from the comparison between them an impressive moral:

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 30.
† Ibid., p. 42.

"There was a clause in the Act of Charles II. which showed the spirit of those times. By this clause it was made penal to say that the King was a Papist. And why? Because such was the precise fact. . . . . By this bill men were forbidden to speak of the defects of Government, and of those abuses which were growing up from day to day to destroy the spirit of the Constitution. If Ministers had not been conscious of the existence of these defects, they would not have forbidden men to discuss them." *

While Parliament was energetic in repressing freedom of speech, the loyal supporters of the Crown were candid in their repudiation of the doctrines of the Constitution, and sycophantic toward those wielding authority. Chief among them was Mr. Reeves, a magistrate of Middlesex, and a trusted friend of the Ministry. He wrote a pamphlet, wherein he stated "that the government of England was a monarchy; but the monarch was the ancient stock from which have sprung those goodly branches of the legislature, the Lords and Commons; that these, however, were still only branches, and that they might be lopped off, and the tree be a tree still—shorn, indeed, of its honours, but not like them, cast into the fire." Sheridan brought this pamphlet to the notice of the House of Commons, whereupon Mr. Windham, Secretary at War, said that the writer was "entitled to the national gratitude, on account of his sacrifices to the public." The House, however ready to uphold the Ministry, could not brook this insult to its dignity and independence. There were only two dissentients to the motion that the pamphlet was a scandalous and

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 79.

seditious libel and a high breach of privilege. The Opposition intimated that they did not desire the prosecution of Mr. Reeves, and would be satisfied if it were ordered that the pamphlet should be burnt by the common hangman. The majority, however, insisted that the Attorney General should prosecute the author, knowing well that the Attorney General would not be too zealous in getting a verdict in his favour, and that a skilfully selected jury might be trusted to acquit the author. A lukewarm prosecution was followed by an acquittal. Had the result been different, and had Mr. Reeves been sentenced to transportation, as Muir and Palmer were by a Scottish Court, this is what Fox pledged himself to do when the Treason and Sedition Acts were debated in the House :—"Even if Mr. Reeves should be found guilty of the libel on that House which had lately engaged their notice, if he should be found to have recommended and circulated another infamous libel against the Constitution, written by Arthur Young, and if he should also be found to have published at different times libels against the Protestant Dissenters, marking them out as a description of people who ought to be exterminated, he would even go upon his knees to beseech his Majesty not to enforce against Mr. Reeves a sentence of transportation." *

Three years later, the Rev. Gilbert Wakefield, a classical scholar worthy to be placed on a level with Parr and Porson, the most erudite men of the age, and, like him, the devoted adherents of Fox, was prosecuted by the Attorney General for a seditious libel. The libellous passages appeared in a pamphlet pub-

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 79.

lished as a reply to one, by the Bishop of Llandaff, on the French Revolution. The Bishop, who read the pamphlet, was not convinced by its reasoning, yet, "thinking the liberty of the Press to be the palladium of the Constitution," he did his utmost to prevent the author from being prosecuted. But an exemplary punishment could alone assuage the wounded feelings of the Ministers, who were charged with tyranny and ruthlessness in pursuing their objects, with being worse than heathens and infidels in their lives, with employing religion as a State engine of despotism and murder. Their accuser declared that he revolted at their audacious imposition and pitied an understanding that could be duped by their despicable artifice. This language was that of a man who felt keenly. It was very different, however, from the atrocious and loyal outpourings of Mr. Reeves. In his defence, Mr. Wakefield said, "Be my notions innocent or be they dangerous, they are but the visions of a peaceful and retired scholar, revealed to enlightened and speculative men. In short (which is my real crime), I look on Mr. Fox as the angel of redemption, and on Mr. Pitt as the demon of destruction." He was found guilty and sentenced to be imprisoned in the common gaol of Dorchester for two years,* while Mr. Reeves, for a more heinous offence in the eye of the Constitution, went at large administering justice in the name of the King and propagating the vilest principles of despotism in the name of public order. Mr. Justice Grose, in pronouncing judgment, employed language which recalls the infamous tirades of Scroggs and

* The Rev. Gilbert Wakefield underwent the imprisonment, and died fourteen weeks after his liberation.

Jeffreys. Fox, who did his best to befriend Mr. Wakefield, was grieved at the way in which he had been treated. In a letter to Lord Holland he states, "I have just read Grose's speech in delivering the sentence upon poor G. Wakefield, and think it the most abominable and indecent production I ever read, though its being so incredibly nonsensical is in some degree a corrective. And what a sentence, too! . . . You know it was said, and believed, that Wakefield was considered as a poor enthusiast, and the sentence would be mild. I never believed this."* It was natural, under such a system, when liberty was manacled by Act of Parliament, and when spies and informers were the freest persons in the land, that Coleridge and Wordsworth, on being overheard speculating about the condition of the human race, should have been suspected of talking treason and treated as dangerous characters. The purest characters were calumniated. No one in the country had a more morbid distaste for French principles than Hannah More; the "sainted Hannah" of Horace Walpole. Few were as devotedly loyal and truly pious; none laboured so assiduously and unselfishly in teaching neglected village children to read and write. These philanthropic efforts rendered her obnoxious to the professed friends of the Constitution and the foes of innovation. She was actually advised by a well-wisher in the Ministerial ranks to "publish a short confession of her faith, as her attachment both to the religion and the government of the country had become questionable to many persons."†

* Memorials, vol. iii., p. 165.
† Memoirs of Hannah More, vol. ii., p. 216.

Fox himself felt the heavy hand of authority. At a dinner given on the anniversary of his birth, over which the Duke of Norfolk presided and at which two thousand persons were present, the Duke gave this toast, "'Our Sovereign's health; the Majesty of the People." For this, he was deprived of his command in the Militia and removed from the Lord Lieutenancy of the North Riding of Yorkshire. A few months later, Fox was in the chair at the dinner of the Whig Club; after the ordinary toasts had been drunk, he rose and said, "I will give you a toast, than which I think there cannot be a better, according to the principles of this Club—I mean the Sovereignty of the People of Great Britain." *

Soon afterwards, the King, at the special suggestion of Pitt,† personally expunged his name from the list of Privy Councillors. The act of Fox was no piece of empty bravado. He held that the Duke of Norfolk ought not to suffer alone for doing that which he himself was prepared to do and to justify. On learning the nature of the Duke's punishment, he thus wrote to the Earl of Lauderdale, "I hope that what I hear is true, and that the dismissal is grounded upon the toast relative to the sovereignty of the people, for there cannot be a better or a more advantageous line of demarcation for us, to distinguish the two parties in the country; for it is impossible to support the Revolution and the Brunswick Succession upon any other principle."‡ The Ministers, being conscious

* Recollections of Fox, by B. C. Walpole, p. 168.

† The King told Mr. Rose, in 1804, that Mr. Pitt "was the person who had proposed expunging Mr. Fox's name from the list of Privy Councillors."—*Diaries of George Rose*, vol. ii., p. 155.

‡ Memorials, vol. iii., p. 276.

of this, projected what they considered a reform, consisting of a political test oath, which "was to disclaim in express terms the Sovereignty of the People."* It is hard to believe that men like Pitt and Lord Grenville could ever have contemplated committing such an egregious and astounding piece of folly. Happily for themselves and the country, an obedient Parliament was never called upon to assent to any measure of the kind. Had it become law, a second Revolution would have been justifiable.

On the 23rd of May he moved the repeal of the iniquitous Treason and Sedition Acts in a speech which, though delivered with his wonted force, was wasted upon his audience. Yet there were passages in it which might have moved the hearts of those who were not utterly dead to the sentiments of freedom. One of these appeals cannot now be read without wonder that it failed to excite a sympathetic response :—"Is it to be conceived that men who have enjoyed for such a length of days the light and happiness of freedom can be restrained and shut up again in the gloom of ignorance and degradation? As well, Sir, might you try by a miserable dam to shut up the flowing of a rapid river; the rolling and impetuous flood would burst through every impediment that man might throw in its way, and the only consequence of the impotent attempt would be that, having collected new force by its temporary suspension, enforcing itself through new channels, it would spread devastation and ruin on every side. The progress of liberty is like the progress of the stream: it may be kept within its banks; it is sure to fertilize the country through which it runs;

* Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. iii., p. 129.

but no power can arrest it in its passage, and short-sighted as well as wicked must be the heart of the projector that would strive to divert its course." *

All his efforts in opposition to the arbitrary measures of the Government having proved unavailing, he resolved upon making another attempt to induce the House to redress the most palpable of public grievances before discontinuing his persistent criticism on the Ministry and his constant attendance in Parliament. He did so on the 20th of May, 1797, when Mr. Grey moved for leave to introduce a Reform Bill. This Bill provided for the extension of the suffrage in counties to copy and lease holders and to all householders in boroughs, thus anticipating, in its principal object, the Reform Act of 1867. It also provided that an elector should not vote for more than one member of Parliament, a provision which, shortly before his death, Mr. Cobden urged as one calculated to afford minorities a fair prospect of being represented. Fox intimated, that, by commencing the work of reform, "we shall give ourselves a chance, and, I may add, the best chance for deliverance, since it would exhibit to the country a proof that we had conquered the first great difficulty that stood in the way of bettering our condition—that we had conquered ourselves; we had given a generous triumph to reason over prejudice; we had given a death-blow to those miserable distinctions of Whig and Tory under which the warfare had been maintained between pride and privilege, and through the contention of our rival jealousies, the genuine rights of the many had been gradually undermined and frittered away." He reminded Pitt of certain utterances

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 338.

evincing that the Prime Minister had proved himself a prophet who had fulfilled his own prediction:—"In 1785 he pronounced the awful prophecy, 'Without a Parliamentary reform the nation will be plunged into new wars; without a Parliamentary reform you cannot be safe against bad Ministers, nor can even good Ministers be of use to you.'" He charged Pitt both with desiring the retention of the existing bad representative system, because it afforded innumerable opportunities for corruption, and with purchasing Parliamentary support by conferring titular honours, no less than 115 new titles, including elevations from one rank in the Peerage to another, having been bestowed during his Administration. Fox left it to the House to inquire "how many of these were to be ascribed to national services, and how many to Parliamentary interest." He ended this speech with a declaration foreshadowing his subsequent action:—"And now, Sir, before I sit down, allow me to make a single observation with respect to the character and conduct of those who have, in conjunction with myself, felt it their duty to oppose this disastrous war. I hear it said, 'You do nothing but mischief when you are here, and yet we should be sorry to see you away.' I do not know how we shall be able to satisfy the gentlemen who feel towards us in this way. If we can neither do our duty without mischief, nor please them with doing nothing, I know but of one way by which we can give them content, and that is, by putting an end to our existence. With respect to myself, and I believe I can also speak for others, I do not feel it consistent with my duty totally to secede from this House. I have no such intention; but, Sir, I have no hesitation in saying that

after seeing the conduct of this House,—after seeing them give to Ministers their confidence and support upon convicted failure, imposition, and incapacity,—after seeing them deaf and blind to the consequences of a career that penetrates the hearts of other men with alarm, and that neither reason, experience, nor duty are sufficiently powerful to influence them to oppose the conduct of Government, I certainly do think that I may devote more of my time to my private pursuits, and to the retirement which I love, than I have hitherto done; I certainly think I need not devote much of it to fruitless exertions and to idle talk in this House. Whenever it shall appear that my efforts may contribute in any degree to restore us to the situation from which the confidence of this House in a desperate system and an incapable Administration has so suddenly reduced us, I shall be found ready to discharge my duty." *

The result of the division was not calculated to divert Fox from the determination announced in his speech. Leave to introduce the Bill was refused by 256 to 91. With the exception of attending, at the request of his constituents, to oppose the Bill for taxing income and to protest against the unfairness of treating professional and fluctuating incomes on the same basis as those derived from realized capital, he absented himself for the next three years, and did so with the entire approval of his constituents. Eleven days previously, Mr. Ponsonby made a motion for reform in the Irish House of Commons, which was rejected by 117 to 30. Thereupon, Grattan and his friends seceded. Thus, for a space of time, the members of the Opposi-

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 367.

tion in England and Ireland absented themselves from their respective Houses of Parliament.

Fox's retired life at St. Ann's Hill was perfectly congenial to him. He loved the country and agricultural pursuits; he was as much at home when disposing of his hay and conversing with neighbouring farmers, as when inquiring into the state of the nation or replying to a speech by Pitt. When he was in Paris, and the sun's heat was scorching, he expressed anxiety lest his turnips would be burned up. The song of birds, and of the nightingale in particular, was to him as exquisite an enjoyment as it was to the late John Stuart Mill; like that renowned philosopher, Fox was an ardent lover of flowers, and had made considerable proficiency as a botanist. Moreover, he took unceasing delight in the works of the great writers of antiquity, and in those of the classical writers of Italy, France, Spain, and England. A volume of Homer or Virgil, of Demosthenes or Cicero, of Ariosto or Racine, of Cervantes, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, or Dryden, always afforded him a relaxation amidst toil, or an occupation during leisure. While he enjoyed and admired the old masterpieces, he read with gratification every new work of merit. His taste was alike catholic and fastidious. In his youth he was struck with Goldsmith's *Traveller*. Later in life he enjoyed the poetry of Cowper, the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the versified narratives of village life by Crabbe, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, by Scott. He thoroughly appreciated a good novel or tale by whomsoever written. If he admired Fielding's *Tom Jones*, he also admired Mrs. Sheridan's *Sydney Bid-*

dulph, and read with interest the writings of Madame d'Arblay and Mrs. Barbauld.

His pecuniary embarrassments were at an end in the year 1793; private friends then paid his debts, and presented him with an annuity of £3000. He never afterwards made a bet or engaged in any game of chance. In 1795 he married Mrs. Armitstead, who had lived for some time previously with him; this union increased the comfort of his later years. His nephew, Lord Holland, to whom he acted as guardian, was trained by him with all a father's care, and repaid this with all a son's affection. One of the first thoughts of his leisure hours was to write a book. He meditated a work on Racine, one of his favourite authors, whose plays, he fancied, were neither sufficiently well known nor adequately valued in this country. A new edition of Dryden's works was also planned by him. He finally determined, however, to begin a history of England from the time of the Revolution, and thus furnish an antidote to the pernicious and unconstitutional views of Hume.

He attended the meeting of Parliament in January, 1800, for the purpose of condemning the rejection of Bonaparte's overtures for peace. That heir of the Revolution was now entering upon his inheritance; he had already been hailed as First Consul. He wrote a letter to George the Third, in which he proposed that hostilities should be terminated between the two countries. Lord Grenville, then Secretary for Foreign Affairs, writing to his brother, the Marquess of Buckingham, immediately after the receipt of the letter, communicates its contents, and adds, "I need not tell you that we shall

say—no." * In a subsequent letter, Lord Grenville uses the phrase "that nest of robbers and assassins, called the French Government." Holding such an opinion, it is not surprising, though it was most lamentable, that he did not give a favourable reception to the friendly views of Bonaparte. Nor is it wonderful, though it is certainly ludicrous, that the reply vouchsafed was to the effect that the best guaranty for peace would be the "restoration of the ancient line of princes under whom France had enjoyed so many centuries of prosperity." There was an audacity, almost sublime, in offering the olive branch to Bonaparte conditionally on his restoring the Bourbons.

Fox never attempted to justify everything the French had done. He thought "that their successive rulers have been as bad and as execrable in various instances as any of the most despotic and unprincipled Governments that the world ever saw." Nor did he wonder at this. They had been bred in the bad school of the House of Bourbon. "They have imitated the practice of their great prototype, and, through their whole career of mischief and of crimes, have done no more than servilely trace the steps of their own Louis XIV. If they have overrun countries and ravaged them, they have done it on Bourbon principles. If they have ruined and dethroned sovereigns, it is entirely after the Bourbon manner. If they have ever fraternized with the people of other countries, and pretended to make their cause their own, they have only faithfully followed the Bourbon example. They have constantly had Louis, the *Grand Monarque*, in their eye." †

* Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. iii., p. 4.
† Speeches, vol. vi., p. 391.

As to a restoration of the House of Bourbon which the Ministry desired, Fox laid down doctrines, then styled revolutionary, but which are truly statesmanlike:—"I think the people of France, as well as every other people, ought to have the Government which they like best themselves, and the form of that Government, or the persons who hold it in their hands, should never be an obstacle with one to treat with the nation for peace, or live with them in amity; but as an Englishman, and actuated by English feelings, I surely cannot wish for the restoration of the House of Bourbon to the throne of France. I hope that I am not a man to bear heavily upon any unfortunate family. I feel for their situation; I respect their distresses; but, as a friend of England, I cannot wish for their restoration to the power which they abused. I cannot forget that the whole history of the country is little more than an account of the wars and the calamities arising from the restless ambition, the intrigues, and the perfidy of the House of Bourbon."* In the course of this speech he made two incidental allusions which are interesting as indications of his opinion: the first was, that every man would desire, once in his life at least, to make a pilgrimage to Switzerland, "the country of liberty and peace;" the second was, he hoped every one was convinced by this time "that a Republican Government, like that of America, may exist without danger or injury to social order or to established monarchies."

In the debates on the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, he took no part. But his opinion was adverse to the Union; he doubted the competence of

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 397.

the Irish Parliament to vote its own annihilation without special authority from the people, and he doubted the advantage of the addition of an hundred members to the Parliament of Great Britain. When, however, the Union was consummated, he expressed himself as adverse to its repeal as he had been to its formation; he formally disclaimed entertaining a thought of reversing what had been done, "that being now impracticable, although he regretted the Union ever having been effected." *

The resignation of Pitt in 1801, and the appointment of Addington as Premier in his stead, was followed by peace with France. Before this occurred, however, an Act of Indemnity was passed for the protection of those who had been too zealous and active in upholding arbitrary power since 1793; a practical confession that the law had been broken by those who were pledged to observe and administer it.

As soon as hostilities with France were suspended, many persons left this country on a visit to Paris. This perfectly lawful and harmless proceeding was regarded with suspicion. Some have thought fit to refer to it in these words:—"About this period several Englishmen, who prided themselves on their patriotism, crossed the Channel to pay their respects to the First Consul. Among them were Mr. Fox, Lord Holland, and Mr. Grey." † The real object of Fox's visit to Paris was to examine the Archives of the Foreign Office there for the purposes of his history. He daily spent several hours in that office reading and transcribing papers. He was presented to the First Consul

* Diary of Lord Colchester, vol. ii., p. 39.
† Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. iii., p. 182.

who tried to propitiate him with flattery, but who only embarrassed and annoyed him. He visited Lafayette at his country residence of Lagrange, where he was received with cordiality and afterwards remembered with affection. The great Republican patriot and the great Whig leader were mutually pleased with each other. The ivy which now mantles the turrets of the gateway at Lagrange was planted by Fox.*

He returned to England firm in the belief that Bonaparte desired to maintain peace. M. Lanfrey, the last and most trustworthy of the historians of Bonaparte, maintains that, in this matter, the English statesman was too sanguine, and allowed his wishes to warp his judgment. If all Bonaparte's demands had been acceded to, he would have kept peace with England till it suited his purpose to attack her; but that his ambition would have been satiated with anything less than the conquest of this country is no longer an open question.

The Addington Administration, which had concluded the peace of Amiens, was as anxious as Fox himself to avoid recommencing hostilities; but there was hardly any option; to avert war had become almost impossible. The King was not displeased at the prospect. He had disapproved of the treaty of Amiens. In that treaty of peace a secret article was inserted relating to Hanover, concerning which he remarked:—"If Ministers think they can *win* me over to their opinions as to peace with these fellows, by stipulations about Hanover, they are mistaken." He told Lord Malmesbury:—"Do you know what I call the peace?—an *experimental peace*,

* Charles de Rémusat's "Angleterre au Dix-Huitième Siècle," vol. ii., p. 560.

for it is nothing else. I am sure *you* think so, and perhaps do not give it so *gentle* a name, but it was *unavoidable*. I was abandoned by everybody—Allies and *all*. I have done, I conscientiously believe, for the best, because I could not do otherwise; but had I found more opinions like mine, better might have been done." * He held similar language after the capitulation of Lord Cornwallis, when the American war could not be prosecuted by anyone in his right mind. However, in this he was perfectly consistent; he could never pardon those who had rebelled against him, or those who had rebelled against their so-called lawful monarch; he was implacable towards American Republicans and French Republicans; in both cases he was ready to fight at any cost, unconditional submission or absolute extermination being, in his opinion, the only alternative.

While indisposed to sanction a renewal of the contest with France, Fox was most reluctant to entrust the Addington Ministry with its conduct. He contended, moreover, that gross insults were not sufficient in themselves to justify an immediate appeal to force for redress. He drew a clear distinction between insults and injuries received by States, and he maintained that "it was not the insult that was the just ground of war, but the refusal of satisfaction for insult, after representation duly made and satisfaction demanded." But no one spoke in stronger and more indignant terms than he used with regard to the demand of Bonaparte to expel the refugees. He said, "Let a man, be he a native of France, of England, or of any other country, observe but the

* Diaries of Lord Malmesbury, vol. iv., pp. 61, 62.

duties of good neighbourhood and submission to the laws, he ought never to be molested for his opinions, in what corner of the earth soever he should retire for refuge. Crimes alone could bring him under the judicial cognizance of any just government. To deny any man, be his condition or rank what it might, or coming from whatever part of the globe, the rights of hospitality for his political principles, would be cruel, cowardly, and totally unworthy of the British character. . . . . To give up men of this description, therefore, would be the worst and basest act I am capable of conceiving. No man, I believe, is more a lover of peace than I am. No one, perhaps—and I hope not to be suspected at this time of bearing hard upon an unfortunate family, when I say it—no one, perhaps, politically speaking, has less respect than I have for the House of Bourbon; yet I am ready to declare that for that family—nay, for the worst prince of that family—if among them there should be a bad one—I should be ready to draw my sword and go to war rather than comply with a demand to withdraw from him the hospitality to which he had trusted."*

There was remarkable unanimity, outside the narrow circle of his own household and the relations whom he had appointed to high office, in considering Addington incompetent to direct the Government while a war with France was being waged. Even the King, who was Addington's strongest admirer, saw that his "own Chancellor of the Exchequer," as he fondly styled him, ought to retire. Pitt, being commissioned to form an Administration, assured his Majesty that public affairs were in so critical a state

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 501.

as to render a strong government indispensable, and that, in such a government, Lord Grenville and Mr. Fox ought to have leading places. His Majesty replied that he had no objection to Lord Grenville and others, who professed Whig views, being appointed Ministers, but that Fox was absolutely inadmissible. The King afterwards told George Rose that "he had taken a positive determination not to admit Mr. Fox into his councils, even at the hazard of a civil war." Lord Grenville and his friends declined to separate themselves from Fox, even though the latter generously urged them not to make his exclusion a ground for their refusal. In a letter to Addington, his Majesty said, "Lord Grenville, Lord Spencer, and Mr. Windham have declined even treating, as Mr. Fox is excluded by the express command of the King to Mr. Pitt."

Like nearly all statesmen who have long been in office, who have enjoyed the intoxication of power, and have for a time pined in the monotony of a private station, Pitt was most anxious to become again a dispenser of patronage and an active ruler of men. Reluctant to imperil his prospects by refusing to accept the King's conditions, and exulting in that sublime belief in himself which was his greatest strength, he determined to act as the head of a Ministry in which, save himself, there was no great administrator, no commanding orator, and in which, with one exception, his colleagues who occupied prominent posts were mediocrities. He had even to undergo the humiliation of having to make overtures to Addington in order to gain votes, and the still more cutting humiliation of being obliged to give places to Addington himself and some of his most

incompetent adherents. This re-arrangement of the Ministry was the topic of Sheridan's happiest sarcasms. "The right honourable gentleman [Pitt] went into office alone; but, lest the Government should become too full of vigour from his vigorous support, he thought proper to beckon back some of the weakness of the former Administration. He, I suppose, thought that the Administration became, from his support, like spirits above proof, and required to be diluted; that, like gold refined to a certain degree, it would be unfit for use without a certain mixture of alloy; that the Administration would be too brilliant and dazzle the House, unless he called back a certain part of the mist and fog of the last Administration to render it tolerable to the eye." *

Great as were Pitt's abilities, he was unable to carry on the Government with effect when surrounded by dummies. Lord Melville, the ablest of his colleagues, was impeached for malversation at the Admiralty. An invasion being apprehended, a ludicrous attempt was made to destroy the enemy's flotilla at Boulogne by means of catamerans, and much money was lavished in erecting useless martello towers around our coasts.

Bonaparte, after taking the title of Emperor of the French, made another personal appeal to the King for peace, but was again repulsed. Pitt formed a project to combine Prussia, Austria, and Russia against the disturber of Europe; subsidies were granted to the German Powers. One glorious success gained by Nelson at Trafalgar, was purchased with his precious life. Disasters succeeded each other in rapid succession. The Austrian General Mack was obliged to

* Sheridan's Speeches, vol. iii., p. 491.

capitulate at Ulm; the battle of Austerlitz, soon after, gave the death-blow to the triple alliance, made Bonaparte master of the most valuable portion of Europe, and broke the haughty heart of Pitt. On the 23rd of January, 1806, the Prime Minister expired at the age of forty-seven. His last words were, "Save my country!" Sheridan told the House of Commons that they must have been uttered owing to a fear "that his incapable colleagues would remain in power." *

What Pitt had apprehended, the King tried to effect. Lord Hawkesbury, the least incapable among his remaining colleagues, was empowered to form an Administration: if he were the best, what must the King have thought of them collectively, when his own opinion of Lord Hawkesbury was thus expressed to George Rose two years previously?—"However the Foreign Ministers might differ on other points, their dislike and contempt for Lord Hawkesbury was decidedly unanimous; his Lordship always approached him with a vacant kind of grin, and had hardly ever anything business-like to say to him." † On this occasion, however, Lord Hawkesbury showed that he was not wholly wanting in common sense by advising that Lord Grenville should be entrusted with the task he had declined to execute. To this the King assented, though it must have been with infinite pain; he had "repeatedly told Mr. Rose, in the course of the past two years, that Lord Grenville was even more offensive to him than Mr. Fox ever was," ‡ and he afterwards complained that his Lordship entered his presence with the air of the victor at Austerlitz.

* Sheridan's Speeches, vol. iii., p. 505.
† Diaries of George Rose, vol. ii., p. 157.
‡ Ibid., p. 390.

Lord Grenville's acceptance of the office of First Lord of the Treasury was conditional upon Fox being his colleague as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The King made no objection, though little more than a year had elapsed since he declared that, rather than assent to this, he would hazard a civil war. George the Third, though a man of extraordinary obstinacy and of undoubted personal courage, was yet prudent enough to yield when longer resistance would have been fraught with real peril. Besides, on this occasion, he derived comfort from the reflection that the new Administration could not dispense with the services of Addington, now Lord Sidmouth, and commonly known by the nickname of "the Doctor." He had so much influence with the King and so large a personal following as to be a powerful and dangerous opponent. On this account he became the indispensable member of successive Cabinets. Canning wittily said, "The Doctor is like the measles; everybody has him once."

When Fox became Secretary of State for the third time, he did not purpose holding that office long. His health was feeble; his love of a country life was intense; his desire to complete his History of England was extreme. Lord Malmesbury remarks that "his death seemed, from the time he took office, to be a near event, and the assiduity and diligence with which he attended both his official and Parliamentary duties, for he did so till even the last days of his existence, hastened the event." * He told his nephew, Lord Holland, that his ambition as a Minister was directed towards two things only—to conclude peace

* Diaries of Lord Malmesbury, vol. iv., p. 354.

and to abolish the Slave Trade; these he considered "two such glorious things," that he could not give them up to any other person, adding, "If I can manage *them*, I will retire." He knew there was an alternative which would enable him to have more leisure, and yet remain in the Cabinet. Indeed, it was formally proposed that he should be raised to the peerage. His reply was, it "seems the natural way, but that cannot be. I have an oath in Heaven against it; I will not close my politics in that foolish way, as so many have done before me." *

One of the first topics on which he had to give an opinion in Parliament was the proposal to pay the debts of Pitt, and vote a public funeral to him. He had no hesitation in voting that £40,000 should be paid to Pitt's creditors, and that his body should be interred in Westminster Abbey at the public cost; but he was unable to unite with the friends of the deceased in declaring that he was an "excellent Minister," whose loss was "irreparable." Accordingly, he opposed the motion as worded, on the ground of the "impossibility of his decreeing honours to Mr. Pitt, who had countenanced and supported a system of government which had unfortunately prevailed through the whole of the present reign—that of invisible influence more powerful than the public servants of the Crown." He told the Speaker, who has left the fact on record, that he had been in great difficulties on that occasion; had offered to support the motion if it were couched in a less offensive form, and had intimated his approval of an inscription expressive of Pitt's "transcendent talents and virtues,

* Lord Holland's Memoirs of the Whig Party, vol. i., p. 250.

and the disinterested integrity displayed through a long course of arduous services." * However, all compromise being rejected, Fox had no option but to notify his disapprobation.

His first work as a Minister was to begin a correspondence with Talleyrand. This led to the Earl of Lauderdale being sent to Paris in order to negotiate a peace; he failed, owing to the excessive and inadmissible demands of the French Government. Despite his aversion to war, Fox entered into hostilities with Prussia. That Power had annexed the Electorate of Hanover in a summary and most unjustifiable manner. In considering the course to be pursued, Fox remembered his declarations repeatedly made in the House of Commons, to the effect that "the justifiable grounds of war were insult, injury, or danger. For the first, satisfaction; for the second, reparation; for the third, security is the object. Each of these, too, was the proper object of negotiation, which ought ever to precede war, except in the case of an attack actually commenced."† On this occasion, he could not obtain either satisfaction or reparation. The King of Prussia, being entirely subservient to Bonaparte, had annexed Hanover as much to please the French and humiliate Great Britain, as to gratify himself. Sir George Jackson states that, when the English Ambassador, acting upon instructions from home, asked for his passports, "the greatest consternation was excited by this prompt decision of the British Government."‡ Fox censured

* Diary of Lord Colchester, vol. ii., p. 31.
† Speeches, vol. v., p. 25.
‡ The Diaries of Sir George Jackson, vol. i., p. 427.

both the seizure itself, and the arbitrariness with which the people of the country were treated by the King of Prussia and by Bonaparte. No regard was paid to their feelings. Upon presenting the King's Message to the House on the 23rd of April, he put the case in the following terms :—"If we are to make exchanges, let us exchange those things which are the proper objects of exchange; let us give a field for a field, or let us exchange its stock, its oxen, and its sheep; but let us not consider the people of a country, or the subjects of a State, as matter for exchange or barter. There must be, in every nation, a certain attachment of the people to its form of government, without which no nation can subsist. The principle, then, of transferring the subjects of one prince to another, strikes at the foundation of every government, and the existence of every nation."* To a reader of this generation, the foregoing views appear trite and commonplace. But, when expressed, they were novel. Fox was almost singular among the statesmen of his age in apprehending the true principle of nationalities. So little were the inhabitants of a country considered that the strongest contemporary denouncers of Bonaparte, instead of censuring him for wrongs inflicted on alien nations, execrated him for having despoiled crowned heads alike of their possessions and their subjects. Rulers, deprived of thrones, excited sympathy; the enslaved people had few friends. Lord Suffolk, then Secretary of State, upon being officially informed that Russia, Prussia, and Austria had agreed to apportion among themselves a part of Poland, and to convert Poles, by royal decree, into Russian, Prussian, and

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 647.

Austrian subjects, simply remarked that it was "a very curious transaction."

Fox's health was so much impaired in the spring of 1806 that his physicians counselled rest; but their remonstrances could not avail to induce him to absent himself on the 10th of June, the day appointed for moving resolutions against the Slave Trade. Although suffering from great debility, he yet made a most animated and telling speech. His motion was carried by 114 to 15; a similar one moved by Lord Grenville in the House of Lords was carried by 41 to 20. The session being too far advanced, the Bill to give effect to these resolutions was not introduced till the following year, when it passed into law. Pitt had often, and with great eloquence, denounced the Slave Trade; but he had never made its abolition a government measure. He knew that the King was opposed to interference with the traffic in negroes;* whatever the King strongly disliked, he forbore to press.

This was the last appearance and the last speech of the great Whig statesman in the House, of which he had been a member for nearly forty years, of which he was now the leader and, by common consent, the greatest ornament. His malady was a disease of the liver which, in its last stage, took the form of dropsy. He died at Chiswick House on the 13th of September, 1806, at the age of fifty-eight. The details of his fatal illness and his dying moments have been recounted with minuteness by Mr. Trotter, his private secretary, and by Lord Holland, his nephew. These, however, are matters with which the public has no more concern

* Court and Cabinets of George III., vol. iv., p. 152.

than about the details of the birth of a public man. The bedchamber ought to be regarded as sacred to all but privileged friends and members of the sufferer's family. Instead, then, of reproducing what ought never to have been paraded before the world, let me give, as the last words of Fox, his final utterance in public at the time of his re-election for Westminster, after being appointed Secretary of State, and some of his farewell remarks in Parliament. He told the electors of Westminster: "I am now what I always have been, a friend to liberty, an enemy to corruption, and a firm and decided supporter of that just weight which the people ought to have in the scale of the Constitution."* In the House of Commons, when last he appeared there, he moved the following resolution:—"That this House, conceiving the African slave trade to be contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy, will, with all practicable expedition, proceed to take effectual measures for abolishing the said trade in such manner and at such period as may be deemed advisable." This motion was prefaced with a speech of which the following is the opening sentence:—"So fully am I impressed with the vast importance and necessity of attaining what will be the object of my motion this night, that if, during the almost forty years that I have had the honour of a seat in Parliament, I had been so fortunate as to accomplish that, and that only, I should think I had done enough, and could retire from public life with comfort, and the conscious satisfaction that I had done my duty."† No other

* Memoirs of the Public Life of C. J. Fox, by R. Fell, vol. ii., p. 577.

† Speeches, vol. vi., p. 658.

statesman ever closed his career in the House of Commons in a more admirable and noble strain. He was honoured with a public funeral. The mortal remains of Fox were appropriately laid in Westminster Abbey, alongside of those of his great rival in statesmanship, William Pitt, and near to those of his equal in patriotism and oratory, Lord Chatham.

V.

HIS STATESMANSHIP.

WHEN Fox entered the arena of Parliamentary debate, hardly a man in years though full of confidence and capacity, he astounded all competitors and rejoiced all his friends. The early anticipation of Sir George Savile, that his readiness in detecting blots and his celerity in hitting the bird's-eye of an argument would ensure his rapid advancement to the first place among debaters, proved to have been well founded. His large fund of general and useful knowledge, and the ease with which he turned it to the best account, confirmed the assertion of that shrewd observer, "that others may have more stock, but Fox has more ready money about him than any of his party."* At first, however, he was merely an irregular and flaming meteor in the political firmament, dazzling beholders, but shedding no steady light to guide their footsteps. He reminded men of the versatile and brilliant Charles Townshend, whom everybody admired but in whom none would confide. He was as luminous, genial, and witty as Lord North, as fluent and sensible as George Grenville, as dogmatic and presumptuous as Rigby, as emphatic and personal as Barré. The young debater was

* Memoirs of the Marquess of Rockingham, vol. i., p. 228.

not afraid to measure himself with Edmund Burke, and he did so with a success deemed marvellous.

During the opening years of his attendance in the House of Commons, whether filling a subordinate position in the Administration of Lord North, or acting as an independent member, his speeches were all effective and were enjoyed for their point and freshness, yet they seemed to be the utterances of a clever young man who delighted in showing his skill in fence and attack, or of an advocate who takes a side and upholds it in the interests of others, rather than those of the statesman who subordinates himself to the cause of his country. He then acted as the exponent of his father's views and the mouthpiece of family rivalries. Stephen, his elder brother, did likewise: he, too, spoke with quickness and cleverness; but he gave no promise of ever displaying anything superior to empty loquacity; had he lived longer, he would have been to Charles James the foil which the second Lord Chatham was to his younger brother William Pitt.

The American war evoked the generalship and statesmanship of two of George the Third's best and least appreciated subjects—George Washington and Charles James Fox. As to the impolicy of that war, Fox had no doubt from the outset. When the disturbances at Boston were made a pretext for a measure designed to punish the Americans and uphold the right to tax them, he refused his sanction. When the repeal of the obnoxious tea duty, the imposition of which had originated the rebellion, was moved on the 19th of April, 1774, he was one of the small minority of forty-nine that supported and voted for the measure of conciliation. If the prudent and

rational views of the members of that minority had prevailed, a bloody and unnatural civil war might have been averted. From the beginning of the year 1774 till the spring of the year 1782, Fox displayed all the energy and arts of an incomparable orator in denouncing the war, and all the tactics of a great party leader and genuine statesman in labouring to terminate it. In Grattan's opinion, his speeches during this period were the finest of all those he delivered in Parliament. Gibbon considered that he then exhibited, in his conduct of a party, capacity for governing an empire.

Clearly perceiving, at an early period in his political career, that efficient government was impossible so long as Parliament was checked in yielding due obedience to the wishes of the nation, Fox stood forward as the champion of Parliamentary independence against royal supremacy and dictation. Fearing lest the army, which should have coerced the refractory Americans into submission, would next be employed to suppress liberty at home, he considered that the conquest of America would be a greater evil than the dismemberment of the empire.

That the influence of the Crown had waxed so strong, and had been exercised so unscrupulously as to constitute a national danger, was admitted by the House of Commons which supported the King's policy. The general feeling alike of Parliament and the nation was expressed in the words of Dunning's successful motion:—"It is now necessary to declare that the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished." Thinking men of all parties agreed that a radical change

ought to be made; hence the approval extended to Burke's Bills for Economical Reform, and the Bill forbidding Government contractors to sit in Parliament. But to any change, the King was irreconcilably opposed. Fox, on the other hand, not only advocated what Burke and others had proposed, but wished to dam up the current of intimidation and corruption at the fountain head. He desired to restrain and reform the Crown; to restore the system of constitutional rule which prevailed when the great-grandfather and grandfather of George the Third occupied the throne. George the Third claimed the right of employing as responsible advisers those only whom he personally liked, and who were ready to consult and execute his personal wishes. Fox maintained that whoever was clearly designated by the voice of the country, and obtained the approval of Parliament, ought to receive and enjoy the confidence of the Crown till the country spoke in a different sense and the support of Parliament was formally withdrawn. Such is the present practice; but that system George the Third combated with all his might, and regarded as an unjustifiable restriction upon his sway.

The system which the King favoured and Fox opposed now prevails in the United States of America. There, the President composes his Cabinet of those whom he personally prefers. The only check upon him is the concurrence of the Senate in his nominations. The framers of the plan doubtless thought that in this, as in other matters, the Senate would be as tractable as the English House of Lords. Nor have they been mistaken. The disapproval of the Senate is the exception, and, when the Senate has ratified an

appointment, no alteration can be made in the Cabinet, except by voluntary resignation, so long as the President is satisfied. Thus, while the objectionable system has been abandoned in this country, it is perpetuated in the United States in the form most obnoxious to many of our forefathers at the time when the Americans had resolved to emancipate themselves from all dependence upon England.

Much might be said in argument alike for the contention of George the Third and the objections of Fox. Neither inflexible rule, nor immemorial custom, could be cited in favour of the one view or the other. At the Revolution of 1688, and at the time when the Act of Settlement was added to the Statute Book, a single consideration was paramount; the substitution for a family, which asserted a divine claim and an hereditary right to rule over this country, of a family which could make no such pretension, and would be unlikely to strive to give effect to the consequences of such a claim. It was supposed that, if Parliament were recognized as supreme, the machinery of Government would naturally adjust itself in such a manner as to render the Sovereign in fact as in supposition the servant of the Constitution. The mode in which the Sovereign should appoint his advisers was not defined. William the Third began by selecting Ministers from all parties: Whigs and Jacobites sat in the same Cabinet Council. They gave the King little advice, their duty being to execute his orders and act as heads of departments. He was the chief of his own Cabinet. At a later period, he entrusted administrative functions to Whigs alone. Queen Anne chose Ministers who possessed the confidence of Parliament, and the two first Georges

found themselves obliged, by the necessities of their position, to act after the same fashion.

To accept as absolutely binding a precedent taken from the reign of William the Deliverer would be ridiculous. That monarch's situation was as exceptional as his service. Even George the Third would have found that he had gone too far if, relying on the fact that William the Third had vetoed Bills, he had ventured to do likewise. The defensible course for him in an emergency was adherence to the practice of his immediate predecessors. They had reigned long enough to establish a trustworthy precedent for their immediate descendants. This was the view of Fox and the Whig party. But the King thought differently.

George the Third was convinced that his grandfather and great-grandfather had been fettered and enslaved, had been the mere puppets of Ministers, and were either afraid or unable to magnify their offices. He deliberately resolved that nothing which he could do to establish an opposite system should be left undone. Accordingly, he determined to be guided in all things by his own opinions or prepossessions, to appoint no Minister who thought and acted in a way displeasing to him, or, if forced by circumstances to appoint any one to high office against his own wishes, to withhold from that Minister his confidence and cooperation. Many applauded his procedure. In the reigns of the two first Georges, nothing of importance could be gained by those who were personally liked by their Sovereign. No man was a greater favourite with George the Second than Carteret, yet he could do less for Carteret whom he loved than he had to do for Pitt whom he detested. The monarch's friends

might possess his affection, but they could not always get promotion. The personal friends of George the Third, on the contrary, had everything in their favour. They had only to conciliate him in order to have their highest ambition gratified. He was as ready to serve and reward those who stood by him as he was irreconcilable to those who opposed a measure of which he approved, or a man whom he trusted and honoured. When he found himself hard pressed and in evident antagonism to Parliament, his favourite declaration was that he would "never stoop to Opposition"—would not degrade himself, as he thought, by choosing a new Ministry from the ranks of those who had defeated the Ministry with which he was entirely pleased.

The Earl of Bute, George Grenville, the Duke of Grafton, Lord North, the Earl of Shelburne, William Pitt, Henry Addington, were all Prime Ministers by virtue of the King's personal choice. He even nominated great officers of State without consulting, or considering the opinion of the head of the Administration. Thus Lord Eldon became Chancellor without Addington, his official superior, having any voice in the appointment. Lord Eldon himself said, and saw nothing strange in the avowal, "I was the King's Lord Chancellor, not the Minister's." * The Marquess of Rockingham, and the Duke of Portland became Prime Ministers by what the King and his friends called "storming the Closet." When, however, his Majesty had to entrust the Government to a Liberal Ministry, he thwarted his unwelcome advisers in every possible way; intrigued against them; instigated others to do likewise, till their authority being under-

* Life of Lord Eldon, vol. i., p. 367.

mined, and their measures having miscarried, their downfall occurred.

To this system, which had no justification according to the spirit of the Constitution, George the Third had in Fox a consistent, an indefatigable, and unyielding opponent. The statesmanship of the Whig leader was antagonistic to the Sovereign's policy. Fox was ready to respect and anxious to uphold all the just and innocuous privileges of the Crown, but he was still more inclined to sustain and defend the acknowledged rights of the people. Chief among the latter, he ranked the principle that, whenever Parliament advised or intimated that a Ministry ought to be changed, the change should be at once made by the King. He thought Parliament should govern and the Monarch reign. George the Third thought that Parliament ought to defer to his opinions; that, as the father of his people, it was for him to decide what was best for them; that he alone was competent to interpret the Constitution in doubtful cases; that, whatever he determined and performed must be for the best, provided it had the approval of his own conscience. In practice, he prudently confined his antagonism, not to Parliament as a whole, but to a section of it; he held that all who were not with him were against him, that all who voted against the Ministry of his own choice formed a factious Opposition, and he knew that the ruling spirit in that Opposition was Fox.

What temporarily strengthened the King's hands was the tacit or open approval his policy originally met with alike in Parliament and throughout the country. It was not universally considered monstrous or prejudicial, at the beginning of his reign, that he

should assert his prerogative of choosing advisers for purely personal reasons; nor was such a course then regarded as an innovation or a danger. When no national principle is at stake, where there is no interference with freedom, nor any illegal impost to repudiate and resist, the English people have always been prone to admire a display of energy and self-assertion on the part of the Sovereign. At the middle of the Eighteenth century, the nation at large did not thoroughly understand the value, in a constitutional sense, of the insignificant and secondary parts the two first Georges had played. On the contrary, there was a widespread and irrational belief that the noble Whig families had become too powerful, and the wearer of the crown too much of a figure-head. Thus the plan of George the Third, which involved the transfer of power from the Whig party to himself, found favour, at the outset, with the nation. In neither of the two preceding reigns could a section composed of the King's friends have grown influential. Such a body was now the stay and tool of the Crown; a terror to the constitutional party in Parliament. By the members of this small but almost irresistible phalanx of royal servants, the Monarch's failings were lauded as truly kingly virtues; his childish personal antipathies were called natural and proper dislikes; his pettish obstinacy was styled firmness; his attachment to certain favourites was eulogised as discrimination in selecting and trusting the most worthy.

The general inclination to approve of what the young Monarch did was increased by his conduct as a husband. He was one of the few Sovereigns whose conjugal fidelity was altogether exceptional. Lord Chancellor

Thurlow, in his coarse style, expressed the common opinion when telling the Prince of Wales he would never be popular like the King, who was "faithful to that ugly woman, your mother." While the contrast between the domestic morality of George the Third and his two predecessors was striking in the earlier part of his reign, the contrast at a later period between himself and his son and successor was greater still. Thus he had a hold upon the nation's heart such as not many English monarchs have secured. He was admired because he was a good husband; it was fervently hoped that his reign would be protracted, seeing that his eldest son, who would succeed him, was an utter reprobate.

George the Third's ill-timid, unwise, and fruitless efforts to crush John Wilkes; the encouragement he gave to the high-handed infringement of the rights of the electors for Middlesex; his pertinacious support of the war with America after success was as undesirable as it was impossible, all lessened his early popularity, and made even a House of Commons, elected to support Lord North, formally withdraw confidence from that Minister's Administration. Then it was that Fox triumphed most completely. If it had not been for his subsequent error in coalescing with Lord North, his triumph would have been unalloyed and enduring.

Fox considered the Coalition a defensible and necessary measure. He thought it offered the means for effectually checking the undue interference and the insufferable dictation of the Sovereign. One result of the Coalition was to give the Sovereign an opportunity to exalt the prerogative to as high a

pitch, and to exercise kingcraft with as great boldness, as had ever been imagined by James the First. Seldom did Pitt say anything more striking, never did he try to hinder anything in which his failure was more to be deplored, than when, as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Administration of the Earl of Shelburne, he thus opposed and spoke of the projected union between Fox and North:—"If, however, the baneful alliance is not already formed, if this ill-omened marriage is not already solemnized, I know a just and lawful impediment, and, in the name of the public safety, I forbid the banns." *

Not the public safety so much as political morality was in peril of shipwreck. The union of two bodies of politicians, who for years had acted as relentless foes, appeared to be as ominous of misfortune as a coalition between policemen and pickpockets. Fox and North joined hands on terms honourable to both; their motives were unimpeachable; their designs were exalted and praiseworthy, yet who could fathom their hearts or forecast their action? Were policemen to enter into a brotherhood with professional thieves, they might succeed in converting the plunderers of property into guardians of public safety; yet it is more reassuring to see the accredited preservers of the peace and protectors of property remain in open antagonism to the filchers of purses and the robbers of dwellings. Influenced by such a feeling, the nation regarded with placid satisfaction the intrigues of the King to overthrow the Coalition. The people were lukewarm when the prerogative was openly exerted to retain in office the Administration

* William Pitt's Speeches, vol. i., p. 61.

of Pitt, despite votes of want of confidence passed by the House of Commons. The blunder which Fox had made as a tactician could neither be retrieved nor counterbalanced by his oratory; and the wielder of the sceptre worsted by his obstinacy the possessor of the most eloquent tongue of the day, the head of a Parliamentary majority, and the upholder of truly constitutional doctrines.

Nothing but entire misapprehension of the issue involved, and blindness to the value of the principle at stake, can excuse the lovers of our free Constitution who patiently submitted to see it attacked in its essence alike by the King and his first Minister. Pitt's defence, as the avowed head of a minority in the House of Commons, took the form of taunting his opponents with a desire to force "themselves upon the Sovereign against his will," and of asserting that it was contrary neither to the letter of the law nor to the spirit of the Constitution to hold office when deprived of the support of the House.* Moreover, he did not hesitate to express doctrines which Clarendon might have praised, but which Somers would have spurned; doctrines which in our day would be rejected and stigmatized as utterly unconstitutional by the most thorough-going Tory. He said, "Prerogative, Sir, has been justly called a part of the rights of the people, and sure I am it is a part of their rights, which the people were never more disposed to defend, of which they never were mere jealous than at this hour. Grant only this, that this House has only a negative in the appointment of Ministers, and you transplant

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 143.

the executive power into this House."* No Minister since the Revolution had treated the Commons with such contumely, had called in question their privileges with greater audacity, had limited their jurisdiction with greater distinctness. As if this language were not sufficiently haughty and menacing, he used a still loftier strain in a subsequent debate: "Attempts have been made to fix imputations of criminality on the present Administration. Their sins have been stated, and one of the most glaring of them is, that the late Ministry was dismissed against the sense of the House. But what is the meaning of this charge? To what conclusion does the argument, when followed up, lead? Does it not fairly admit of this comment, that it is improper for his Majesty to dismiss his Ministers, provided they are approved of by the House of Commons, and that so long as they act agreeably to its sentiment, so long and no longer must they possess the patronage of the Crown, and retain the offices of Administration? Is this a decent treatment of the prerogative? Is this constitutional doctrine? Is it not degrading the dignity of the Sovereign? Is it not a transference of the prerogative of the Crown to the House of Commons, and placing the royal sceptre under the mace that lies upon the table?" †

In terms like these, Chancellor Maupeou might have fitly spoken in the name of the despotic Louis the Fifteenth to the recalcitrant Parliament of Paris. If Strafford had heard such a speech in his day, he would have counselled Charles the First to bestow his entire confidence on the speaker. Had Bolingbroke survived

* Speeches, vol. i., p. 153. † Ibid., p. 159.

to hear or read it, he would have rejoiced at beholding a patriot King efficiently served by a truly prerogative Minister, and he would have seen, with still greater pleasure, the nation acquiescing in the utterances of the Minister and tamely submitting to the conduct of the Monarch. To George the Third and his friends this language seemed that of a man commissioned by Heaven to uphold royalty upon earth.

The principles avowed, and the course pursued by Pitt, had the justification of success. Throughout the country, at the general election in 1784, the cry of "Pitt and the Constitution!" awakened a response denied to that of "Fox and free Government!" Confirmed in office by an overwhelming majority, Pitt was the strongest Minister since the days of Sir Robert Walpole, and George the Third became the most arbitrary monarch since the days of Henry the Eighth. From the position of leader of a great party, Fox was reduced, during twenty-two years, to be the impotent denouncer of a system he detested and a form of government he abhorred.

To the superficial observer, his practical statesmanship will appear a failure as a whole. Neither during the war with America, nor during the war with France, did he succeed in getting his policy of peace accepted and enforced. The close union he desired to see established between the Republic of the United States and the parent country was not effected; mutual suspicion was cherished, and took the place of the mutual cordiality which he advocated. The good understanding which he wished to establish with France, when she had become emancipated from the rule of the Bourbons, was regarded as a calamity to

be averted, and the country squandered its treasures in men and gold to counteract that policy and to restore the Bourbons. Most disheartening of all may seem to be the long Administration of Pitt. But all these appearances are wholly deceptive. Although Pitt rode into power on prerogative, yet he maintained his ground, not so much through the approval and support of the King, as on account of the King's conviction that the Minister's retirement would be the greatest of evils. In minor matters George the Third was allowed to be supreme ; he distributed appointments in the army, the church, and the law, according to his will and pleasure. Sometimes, in exercising patronage, he thwarted his Ministers, and put them in very embarrassing positions;* they submitted for the sake of the latitude enjoyed by them on many important measures of State policy. One of the secret advisers of the King was Jenkinson, afterwards Earl of Liverpool. In 1786, he took up a position in debate which was understood to have the approval of the Court, and was adverse to the view of the Ministry. An eye-witness records the general belief that some years earlier the attitude of Jenkinson would have materially affected the division. "But those times no longer existed, when in every part of the House were found the King's friends. The very race had almost become extinct, and another class of men, the Minister's friends, supplied their place." † Lord Malmesbury tells us that the King did not uniformly find Pitt a pliant and subservient Minister, such as Lord North had been, and as Addington

* See Court and Cabinets of George III., for examples of this; particularly a letter from Mr. W. W. Grenville, in which he speaks of the folly and precipitation "of the King," vol. ii., pp. 132, 138.

† Posthumous Memoirs, by Sir N. W. Wraxall, vol. ii., p. 134.

became. He expressed himself as having been "long dissatisfied with Pitt's and particularly with Lord Grenville's 'authoritative manners' towards him."* Thus Pitt held office by that very Parliamentary tenure which he had ridiculed. For the way in which he had acquired power, he deserved all Fox's reproaches, but the principles of statesmanship which Fox propounded were not invariably set at nought during the Administration of Pitt. Between them both were many more points in common than between either of them and the King. The conclusive vindication of Fox's statesmanship is that it is now consecrated by our Constitutional practice.

Another element in his statesmanship, though less important in a Constitutional sense, was quite as noteworthy, and equally honourable to him as a man. This was his attachment to peace; a rooted preference for national progress by commerce to aggrandizement through conquest. The poet wrote, "Peace when he spoke was ever on his tongue." Late in his political career, after declaring in the House of Commons "It is with heartfelt satisfaction I reflect that, in everything I ever proposed, I have supported the dignity of this country," he added these memorable words, "I regard it as a circumstance of good fortune to me, that I never gave an opinion by which one drop of British blood was shed or any of its treasure squandered."† From his earliest to his latest years he advocated and depicted the superior advantages of peace over war. In 1782, he avowed himself "for peace in preference to war. It was not the policy of

* Diaries of Lord Malmesbury, vol. iv., p. 2.
† Speeches, vol. v., p. 431.

this nation to go to war for territory, from the lust of mere dominion, or the love of power. He would be as moderate in his desire of new acquisitions as he would be determined in his resolution to keep what we have."*

But for peace at any price; for turning the left cheek to the smiter; for yielding everything rather than fight for anything, Fox never was an advocate. When the armies of George the Third were commissioned to crush liberty in America, when the armies of Austria and Prussia were marching to crush liberty in France, he was one of the heartiest in applauding the armed resistance made by Americans and Frenchmen. Had this country been placed in like circumstances, his voice would have been among the loudest for war. He expressed a hope, "if ever we should be in the situation of the French, that we shall not hesitate to expend the whole capital of the country rather than have a Constitution imposed on us by a foreign enemy. I had rather all should be taken away by the calamities of the present war; I had rather we should submit to one, two, three, or four requisitions of all the adults in the kingdom; all this I would rather submit to, than that the country should experience the misery of absolute servitude."† Yet, while ready to engage in war when the arbitrament of arms had become the last resort, and to prosecute such a war with the utmost vigour, he would always be ready to negotiate. He constantly inculcated the maxim that "to propose negotiation was not to sue for peace." The motions he repeatedly made to induce the

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 106.
† Speeches, vol. v., p. 195.

Ministry to enter into negotiations with France, were the expression of his belief that a desire to sheathe the sword when glory had been gained and honour satisfied, so far from being in the least derogatory, was most creditable to this country. He held that,—"It is at every moment dignified and proper to strive to restore the blessings of peace, and it is certainly one thing to propose a negotiation in which terms are to be fairly and manfully discussed, and another to sue to your enemy for peace. He who objects to this distinction is not animated by that feeling which ought ever to be uppermost in the mind of a statesman—an anxious desire of shortening the calamity of war, and paving the way by every practicable means to that desirable end."*

While thoroughly appreciating the excellencies of the British Constitution, Fox was not one of those who regarded it as the Ark of old, which to venerate was a duty and to touch was sacrilege. He was not haunted with the blind fear which confounds innovation with destruction, nor was he imbued with that craving for novelty which can only be gratified, without being satiated, by perpetual and objectless change. In 1792, he recalled to the mind of the House, he had said in one of his very first speeches, "that the greatest innovation that could be introduced into the Constitution of England was to come to a vote that there should be no innovation in it."† At one time he thought "that annual or triennial Parliaments would be an improvement calculated to preserve the privilege of the people from the encroachments of the prerogative of the

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 212.
† Speeches, vol. iv., p. 410.

Crown." * To universal suffrage, his objection "was not distrust of the decision of the majority, but because there was no practical mode of collecting such suffrage, and that by attempting it, what from the operation of hope on some, fear on others, and all the sinister means of influence that would so certainly be exerted, fewer individual opinions would be collected than by an appeal to a limited number." † Had the improved electoral machinery of the present day been in operation when he lived, he might have advocated a change which is considered by modern Whigs as the most extreme and the last of all. To alarmists and opponents of all reform he offered arguments which would have convinced them had they been capable of dispassionate reasoning:—"The Septennial Act, in the opinion of many, had been the means of preserving the House of Brunswick on the throne. But had such a House of Commons as the present been then in being, what would have become of the House of Brunswick and the Protestant succession? 'What,' they would have said, 'adopt so violent an innovation as septennial instead of triennial Parliaments? Do you mean to subvert the whole fabric of the Constitution? Triennial Parliaments were sanctioned at the glorious epoch of the Revolution; to Triennial Parliaments we owed all the prosperity, all the glory, of the reigns of King William and Queen Mary; to Triennial Parliaments were we indebted for the victory of Blenheim.'" ‡

In discussing every question, Fox counselled men to "look first and last to the reason of the thing,

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 41.
† Speeches, vol. v., p. 108. ‡ Ibid., p. 111.

without considering whether or not the majority was likely to be for you or against you, and least of all to force. He admitted that the majority might sometimes oppress the minority, and that the minority might be justified in resisting such oppression, even by force; but as a general rule, though not without exception, the majority in every community must decide for the whole, because in human affairs there was no umpire but human reason. The presumption was also that the majority would be right; for if five men were to decide by majority, it was probable that three would be right and the two wrong, of which, if they were to decide by force, there would be no probability at all. What was the criterion of truth but the general sense of mankind?" * As a rule, he refrained from laying down general propositions. The exceptions, however, are notable. Of freedom he said that it consists "in the safe and certain possession of a man's property, governed by laws defined and certain, with many personal privileges, natural, civil, and religious, which he cannot surrender without ruin to himself, and of which to be deprived by any other power is despotism." † He held that "Liberty was the essence of the British Constitution;" ‡ that "the end of all government is the happiness of the governed." § His opinion, as to the manner in which men can be governed to their own satisfaction was:— "I know of no way of governing mankind but by conciliating them; and, according to the forcible way which the Irish have of expressing their meaning,

* Speeches, vol. ii., p. 108. † Ibid., p. 238.
‡ Speeches, vol. v., p. 286.
§ Speeches, vol. ii., p. 238.

I know of no mode of governing the people but by letting them have their own way." * "Mankind were made for themselves, not for others; and that was the best government where the people had the greatest share in it." † On the question of the rights of property, Fox was not behind the most advanced thinkers of our day; he maintained that property was not a natural right. "It was an artificial right, the creation of human means, perfectly adventitious, and by no means connected with the dignity, the rank, or the happiness of nature." ‡ Nor would he concede to any one man, as a vested property, the right to govern another. "He was uniformly of an opinion, which, though not a popular one, he was ready to aver, that the right of governing was not a property but a trust, and that whatever was given for constitutional purposes should be resumed when those purposes should no longer be carried into effect." §

Quite as important as any of his opinions in politics or statecraft, and worthy of note in our day when illogical writers and speakers, professing to be Liberals, deprecate the very mention of extreme Liberal theories, is the declaration by Fox that no subject is so sacred that to moot it in Parliament would be censurable. In 1794, when good men were shocked by the decision of a Scottish court of law which sent Muir and Palmer to suffer as convicts at Botany Bay for having entertained speculative views of government which were odious to the ruling power, and when unwise men wished that English

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 317.
† Speeches, vol. i., p. 174.
‡ Speeches, vol. i., p. 407.
§ Speeches, vol. iii., p. 151.

judges could exercise the same authority in their courts; Fox, who was indignant at the brutality of the sentence, said with reference to what had fallen from Mr. Adam:—"My honourable friend has declared that if any Minister should dare to introduce into this country the law of Scotland, he hoped there would be found in this House men bold enough to impeach him. I cannot agree with him on this point; for so dearly do I prize the freedom of debate, in such veneration do I hold the free and unlimited discussion of any political or constitutional question within these walls, and so jealous am I of everything which would look like an infringement of this our most valuable privilege, that if the Minister were to advance the most dangerous and detestable principles—if he were even to propose a bill to this House to alter the succession to the throne, and introduce in the place of our Sovereign a foreign pretender, I would hold him justifiable for the unconstitutional measures he attempted to introduce, and I would with my voice endeavour to rescue him from a public impeachment or prosecution." *

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 204.

VI.

CHARACTERISTICS AS AN ORATOR.

THOUGH a statesman of the first order, yet it was oratory which gave to Fox an indisputable pre-eminence among his contemporaries. He was born with the oratorical temperament; from youth upwards, his ambition was to become a great speaker. He was endowed with an understanding of exceeding quickness, with an imagination of great brilliancy, with feelings of great mobility and tenderness; he had read much in the ancient and modern languages; a retentive memory enabled him to utilize his vast stores of information and illustrations, while his logical disposition led him to marshal in faultless symmetry and imposing array all the arguments he adduced to prove a case or enforce a proposition. His constant appeal was to the intellect, and his aim was to convince by reasoning. He was as practical as Demosthenes. He had none of Cicero's besetting anxiety to demonstrate, when pleading a cause or advocating a policy, that he was an unrivalled master of fine language. No contemporary orator was his parallel. Chatham was a greater adept in dramatic effects. Burke was far more ornate and profound. William Pitt poured forth sentences infinitely superior in finish and melody. Lord North was more uniformly witty; Charles Townshend and

Sheridan were more uniformly brilliant. None, however, among the elder or younger generation of speakers succeeded in making an audience feel, as Fox did, that they were listening to arguments which could not be refuted, and to common sense it was hardly possible to gainsay.

From March, 1769, when he delivered his maiden speech, till June, 1806, when he addressed the House of Commons for the last time, Fox had to maintain his ascendancy as a speaker against veterans in debate and younger men of extraordinary oratorical talents. He began by rivalling George Grenville, Lord North, Wedderburne, Barré, Rigby, Dundas, Dunning, and Edmund Burke. George Grenville was fluent, self-possessed, well-informed; he could harangue by the hour, and utter hard facts by the score; it was impossible to disconcert him, nor was it easy to return a complete, or even plausible answer to the conclusion deduced from his premisses. Lord North was one of the speakers the House always delights to honour. His brilliancy never confounded the country gentlemen; he was never too tedious for the well-read: sparkling in repartee, quick in retort, he was certain to give utterance, in the course of a speech, to one of the happy sayings which are the salt of Parliamentary oratory, are applauded, remembered, and quoted. His exquisite tact, equable temper, inexhaustible good humour, placable disposition, and clever sallies made him a general favourite and earned for him a popularity closely resembling in its basis and character that enjoyed, during many years, by Lord Palmerston. Wedderburne was pert and unscrupulous; a clever debater, though a successful counsel; overflowing with conceit, yet possessing

sufficient ability to justify his presumption. Barré boldly and bluntly gave utterance to unwelcome truths; made a name by vilifying Chatham, and made a position by acting as his follower; he inspired dread by the confidence of his manner, and aroused many a laugh by his pointed wit; his audacity and cleverness rendered him as formidable an opponent as the staunch and stern Jacobite, "downright Shippen." Rigby was a glib speaker, but no orator; he affected the plainness and uprightness of a Diogenes. His studied roughness and avowed detestation of pretence and insincerity; his genuine indifference to personal attacks; his complete want of feeling and sensibility; his unrivalled skill in enriching himself at the public cost, made him a power among his fellows. Dundas knew nearly as well as Rigby how to dip his hand into the national purse; as a speaker, he was equally coarse and dogmatic, without hypocritically parading his honesty and consistency; in political courage, he could not be excelled; in no case, could he be abashed; during the greater portion of his career, he divided with Pitt the management of the House of Commons, and ruled Scotland in the interest of his party, for the enrichment of his family and followers, and in the name of George the Third. Dunning, one of the first among contemporary lawyers, was also one of the weightiest among Parliamentary debaters. His voice was harsh and grating; his manner of speaking was detestable. Yet his matter was always excellent; he was so logical, sensible, and practical that, whenever he addressed the House, he was heard with profound attention and marked respect. Edmund Burke towered above his contemporaries as a philosophical politician,

as a scholar, as a genius. His learning was illumined by a blazing imagination; his utterances were adorned with the most gorgeous and apt illustrations; he had every gift which forms an orator save that of attractive delivery, and every endowment of a statesman save sound judgment. Burke, who was the senior of Fox, taught him lessons which were priceless; the pupil profited so well by the teaching as to outstrip his master and take rank above him, as well as above other contemporaries, as the prince of parliamentary leaders and debaters.

Among the younger men, Fox met with a dangerous rival in the person of William Pitt. The early speeches of Pitt were master-pieces. Eloquence was his heritage, and the House of Commons the predestined theatre for its display. The lucidity of his exposition, the vigour of his declamation, the sting of his sarcasm, the regular flow and careful finish of his sentences, were as notable and striking when he first entered Parliament as they were after he had become its acknowledged ornament. His oratory had neither spring nor autumn. His mind never seemed to have been youthful. No one knew him as a mediocre speaker; it was difficult to believe that he ever had been a boy. Others have made as remarkable maiden speeches, and have shown from the outset as remarkable aptitude for debate, but no speaker ever began so well who did not either sink lower or soar higher. As the head of the Government, and expressing himself with all the authority of a Minister who was sure to be supported by a large majority on a division, he had no incentive to increased exertion. Had the positions of his rival and himself been reversed, and had he ever been put on his defence

as Fox was in the case of the Westminster scrutiny, he might have delivered a speech as exceptional and perfect as that which Fox then delivered. He was a fortunate as well as a precocious statesman; his capacity was prodigious, but his path was very smooth, and the only penalty he paid for his premature and astounding success was to die of exhaustion at an age which most men account early and at which a statesman is thought young.

Sheridan, Windham, Wilberforce, Francis, Canning, and Grey, who also belonged to the younger generation of accomplished speakers, were all men of remarkable powers, yet none of them bore away the palm of oratory from Fox. On a sudden emergency, Sheridan produced no greater impression than men of inferior talent; he required to meditate in the closet before he could shine in the senate; both Fox and Pitt prepared themselves to be orators, whereas Sheridan prepared himself to speak. Windham was pronounced by Fox to be one of the first speakers in Parliament. His attractive oratory could not compensate for utter lack of statesmanship; he was subject to passing whims and to dilate upon crotchets; his desire was that his personal whims should be approved by his fellows, and his crotchets embalmed in legislation. Wilberforce, with a character which commanded respect and a voice of singular sweetness, appealed with irresistible effect to the finest feelings of human nature when pleading, with an earnestness which was the highest eloquence, the cause of the poor slave; but on general topics he was no safe guide and no distinguished discourser. Sir Philip Francis, by carefully studying the letters of *Junius*, had caught the manner of

their author; he was naturally passionate and unscrupulous, and he delivered his opinions with a point and force, a bitterness of invective and an appropriateness of epithet, which attracted general attention. Canning's play of fancy and Grey's imposing declamation were, from the beginning of their careers, admired by the House; but their oratorical reputation did not culminate till after Fox had passed away.

His distinguishing trait as a speaker was spontaneity. His utterances were what, in a letter to Dr. Parr, he held those of a commanding orator ought to be, "the immediate, instantaneous expression of his thoughts."* His preparation consisted in mastering his subject and accumulating facts. How he should turn these facts to account depended on the mood of the assembly he rose to address. Words never failed him. But to spin sentences for the mere pleasure of talking was what he never did himself and never could tolerate in others. In his day the successful schoolboy, as in ours the successful capitalist, could always speak fluently and ineffectively on any subject. At that time, however, phrases would be listened to, notwithstanding their utter emptiness, provided they were cast in a rhetorical shape. It was then considered impertinence to address a body of educated and critical men in the careless and incorrect language of familiar conversation. Hence, the speeches were monotonously rhetorical.

There is no excess of rhetoric in the speeches of Fox. Their style is much more colloquial than that of contemporary orations. Yet words are not scattered at random, though repetitions of the same thought are

* Works of Parr, vol. i., p. 615.

frequent. Being determined to explain his meaning and carry conviction home to his hearers, Fox treats his subject from every point of view, illustrates it in every possible manner, makes everything clear, and renders the conclusions incontrovertible. His expressions are strong and emphatic, as was natural in the case of a man of ardent temperament speaking out of the abundance of the heart, who is thoroughly in earnest, and is convinced that he is in the right. He was conscious of sometimes speaking too unreservedly, and thus excused himself: "it happens to many gentlemen, in the heat and hurry of argument, to be guilty of a little oratorical exaggeration."* Examples of this tendency abound. The King's reign he styled "the most infamous that ever disgraced this nation." The American war was "accursed, diabolical, and cruel;" concerning complaints made about that war, "he trusted that, by the aroused indignation and vengeance of an injured and undone people, Ministers must hear of them at the tribunal of justice, and expiate them on the public scaffold." The King was "that infernal spirit that really ruled, and had nearly ruined this country."† When Secretary of State in 1783, he thus referred to the secret influence behind the throne:—"How, Sir, are Ministers situated on this ground? Do they not come into power with a halter about their necks, by which the most contemptible wretch in the kingdom may despatch them at pleasure? Yes, they hold their several offices, not at the option of the Sovereign, but of the very reptiles who burrow under the throne.

* Speeches, vol. vi. p. 458.
† Speeches, vol. i., pp. 210, 216, 427, ii., p. 29.

They act the part of puppets, and are answerable for all the folly, the ignorance, and the temerity or timidity of some unknown juggler behind the screen."* He once exclaimed that, if the Commons took a particular course, they would be "the most despicable a set of drivellers as ever insulted society under the appellation of law-makers."* Referring in 1794, to the hostilities then in progress, he said, "Both the present and the American war were owing to a Court party in this country that hated the very name of liberty, and to an indifference, amounting to barbarity, in the Minister to the distresses of the people."† The first coalition of European powers against France, he called an "accursed confederacy of despots;" he said the war with France "was in its principle and commencement unjust, unnecessary, and diabolical."‡ For the vehemence of these and other utterances, his own explanation is on record :—"I know that I may be told that I often speak intemperately, and that I do so now; but I speak as I feel, and I think it impossible for any man to feel more strongly than I do at the present situation of this country."

Ornaments and illustrations are numerous and admirable. Referring to Pitt's appropriation of the suggestions of the Opposition, Fox said, "If he is a plagiary, he is a plagiary uncommonly endowed, for he decorates that which he steals in apparel so gay and luxuriant, he enriches whatever he takes with such additions of flowers and embroidery, that though as their legitimate parents we recognize our own offspring, we view them with no small degree

* Speeches, vol. ii., pp. 276, 467.
† Speeches, vol. v., pp. 339, 472.
‡ Speeches, vol. vi., p. 225.

of wonder in their strange and sumptuous attire."* The Convention with Spain "reminded him of a lawyer's will drawn by himself, with the note in the margin of a particular clause, 'This will afford room for an excellent disquisition in the Court of Chancery.'"† With regard to the King's message respecting the war between Russia and the Porte, he said that Pitt, "who moved the address, had enveloped himself in mystery and importance, but had explained nothing. His speech resembled the specimen of the paragraph-writer in the play about Russia, Prussia, Turkey, and what not, of which the person to whom it was shown pronounced that it was well done, for it was finely confused and very alarming."‡ The following, with a slight change, has been used with effect by a succeeding orator:—"He remembered it had been once said, when talking of representation, that any five hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen who could be first stopped at Hyde Park turnpike, and assembled in that House, would be of as much service to the people as they were." In 1791, when it was the fashion among ultra-royalists to speak of our Constitution in the language of hyberbole, Fox said, "he did not like bestowing fulsome and unnecessary praises on the English Constitution. They reminded him of a passage in one of our best poets' best plays; he meant, he said, King Lear, who asks his three daughters how much they love him? Goneril and Regan answer him in terms of the most extravagant

* Speeches, vol. iii., p. 80. This is a variation on the phrase of Sir Fretful Plagiary:—"Serve your best thoughts as the gipsies do stolen children, disfigure them to make 'em pass for their own."

† Speeches, vol. iv., p. 121.

‡ Speeches, vol. iv., p. 174.

panegyric; but when he puts the same question to Cordelia, she answers just as he would answer the same sort of question if it were put to him respecting the Constitution, when he should say he loved the Constitution of Great Britain just as much as a subject of Great Britain ought to love a Government under which he enjoyed such blessings."*

In one of his many speeches advocating complete religious toleration, "he declared it to be his wish to extirpate heresy by the old method of fire; not however, by burning victims, but by burning the various noxious Acts."† The practice having originated about the year 1792, of branding as traitors to the Constitution and the Crown those who did not re-echo the parrot cries of courtiers, Fox thus commented on it :—"There were certain forms and phrases which at present every gentleman who rose to speak was required to repeat; all these, whether 'Church and State,' or 'God save the King,' or anything else, he begged to be understood as having said or sung. As those who had read Italian operas might recollect to have seen prefixed an advertisement by the author, that when he introduced the names of the heathen gods and goddesses, he meant nothing against the holy Catholic religion; so he must advertise the House, that when he made use of the words liberty, equality, impartiality, he used them only in the true sense of the British Constitution, and not as understood, or supposed to be understood, in any other country whatever."‡

Mr. Windham was foremost in proposing strin-

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 234.
† Speeches, vol. iv., p. 425.
‡ Speeches, vol. iv., p. 478.

gent penalties against those whom he charged with seditious practices. Fox ridiculed this by a query, and recalled a most absurd measure once introduced into Parliament:—"Would he adopt the spirit of a Bill once proposed in that House, in consequence of numerous burglaries of which Jews were suspected to be the perpetrators? The tenor of this bill was that any Jew or suspected person seen looking down an area should be guilty of death."*

The outbreak of the French Revolution had made Pitt alter his attitude on the question of Parliamentary Reform, and denounce as revolutionary what a few years previously he had advocated as constitutional and imperative. This gave his rival an opportunity for criticism:—"In the pride of his new wisdom his present self felt such contempt for his former self that he could not look back on his former conduct and opinions without a sort of insulting derision. As Lord Foppington said in the play, 'I begin to think that when I was a Commoner, I was a very nauseous fellow;' so the right honourable gentleman began to think that, when he was a reformer, he must have been a very foolish fellow; he might, nevertheless, have retained some degree of candour for his honourable friend [Mr. Grey], who had not yet received the new lights with which he was so marvellously illuminated."†

In 1793, when the bugbears of the day were French principles, Fox humorously referred to them in a motion for peace with France:—"Such were the horrid effects of fear on account of these principles,

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 61.
† Speeches, vol. v., p. 107.

and so far had it affected the Empress of Russia and the King of Prussia, that they had laid hold of Poland in the panic. He begged pardon of the House for introducing anything ludicrous upon so grave a subject; but a story which he remembered appeared to him so apposite that he could not resist the temptation of reciting it. A person detected in the act of taking a watch out of the pocket of another, being accused of it, confessed the fact, but said in his defence that he had been struck with a panic, and in his fright he had laid hold of the first thing he could, which happened to be the gentleman's watch, which he conveyed into his pocket." *

When Pitt was urging the prosecution of the war, he said :—" The right honourable gentleman, when he appears before us in all the gorgeous attire of his eloquence, reminds me of a story of a barbarous Prince of Morocco, a Muley Moloch, or a Muley Ishmael, who never put on his gayest garments, or appeared in extraordinary pomp, but as a prelude to the murder of many of his subjects. Now, when I behold splendour much more bright—when I perceive the labours of an elegant and accomplished mind—when I listen to words so choice, and contemplate all the charms of his polished elocution, it is well enough for me, sitting in this House, to enjoy the scene, but it gives me most gloomy tidings to convey to my constituents in the lobby."†

The Addington Administration was constantly ridiculed, even by its supporters. By them, the following comparison must have been enjoyed :—" In

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 140.
† Speeches, vol. vi., p. 527.

one of Molière's plays, a grave old gentleman marries a young wife, or does something or other not very suitable to his character. Everybody, however, is mightily content with what he had done; nevertheless, when it is mentioned every one bursts out a-laughing. In the same manner, though it happens that everybody is so well content with the present Ministers, yet when their merits are spoken of it generally produces a laugh, or at least a smile, on every countenance."*

A discussion having arisen whether Parliament should adjourn or should submit to be prorogued, Fox explained that the difference between the two Houses was, "that one of these matters was in the power of the Minister, the other in the power of the House of Commons; which reminded him of a scene in an excellent comedy, wherein the father takes out a bond, and the son says, 'Let me hold it in my hand!' The father says, 'What signifies which of us shall hold it —neither of us shall hold it.' And then he puts it in his pocket. So it was in this case. The Minister asked what difference there was between an adjournment and a prorogation? The difference was that he had the bond in his pocket if there was a prorogation."†

To these specimens of the lighter side of Fox's oratory may be appended two short statements of his personal belief and experience relative to kings in general:—"Although 'as rich as a king,' 'as happy as a king,' and many expressions of the same sort, are common sayings, the breasts of kings have not always

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 550.
† Speeches, vol. vi., p. 619.

been considered as the depositories of gratitude. The phrase of 'as grateful as a king' is not yet proverbial."* "I have frequently had occasion to be convinced that the more Parliament agrees to act (what, in the vulgar phrase, is called) handsomely by the monarch on the throne in pecuniary affairs, the worse effect is sure to flow from it."†

Few of his characteristics as an orator are reproduced in the historical work which, though not finally prepared for the press, was published after his decease, exactly as he left it. To subject his fragment of the History of England to minute criticism would be unfair. Considered, however, simply as an incomplete and unpolished sample, it exhibits Fox in a most favourable light. Whether he would have taken high rank as an historian, had he lived to complete his design, is uncertain; but he unquestionably possessed a great historian's distinguishing qualities, accuracy and fairness. He is impartial in the highest degree and the best sense. To impartiality in opinion he makes no pretence, nor is such impartiality of the slightest value. A writer who has no convictions may be competent to compile a text-book, or edit an almanack, and may earn praise for plodding industry. Those who succeed in evenly balancing between two sides must be indifferent to both, and are certain to be respected by neither. Trimming of this sort Fox despised in history as in politics, yet he earnestly desired to state the case of those with whom he differed as fairly and fully as that of the side he espoused. His historical fragment is a model of

* Speeches, vol. v., p. 161.
† Speeches, vol. vi., p. 478.

judicial statement of facts and careful estimate of evidence.

His opinions on important points are identical in the fragment with those expressed in his speeches. Thus, in a debate on the 10th of December, 1795, he said:—"The people of England had, in his opinion, committed a worse offence by the unconstitutional restoration of Charles II., than even by the death of Charles I."* In the introduction to his History he characterizes a restoration as "usually the most dangerous and worst of all revolutions."† During his lifetime, it was not so common as it now is, to acknowledge an undoubted fact in the following terms:—"The splendour of Cromwell's character and exploits renders the era of the Protectorship one of the most brilliant in English history."‡ No writer has described the reign of Charles the Second more happily than Fox when he styled it "the era of good laws and bad government."§ As he contended in the House of Commons, so he wrote in his History, "The royal prerogative ought . . . to be reduced to such powers as are in their exercise beneficial to the people."‖ His opinions as to blind loyalty are implied in the phrase used by him to characterize the armed opposition made by the Scottish Presbyterians to King James the Second, which "was styled, in the usual insulting language of tyrants, a most unnatural rebellion."¶ The love of royalty, he says, "Creates a kind of passionate affection for whoever happens to be the wearer of the crown."** Commenting upon the Popish plot, he gives expres-

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 79.
† History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II., p. 8.
‡ History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II., p. 18.
§ Ibid., p. 20. ‖ Ibid., p. 39. ¶ Ibid., p. 115. ** Ibid., p. 136.

sion to just, though bitter, reflections upon monarchs: "The King, who is supposed to have disbelieved the whole of the plot, never once exercised his glorious prerogative of mercy. It is said he dared not. His throne, perhaps his life, was at stake; and history does not furnish us with the example of any monarch to whom the lives of innocent, or even meritorious, subjects ever appeared to be of much weight, when put in balance against such considerations."* The Duke of Monmouth belonged to the Whig party; when recording this, Fox expounds his own view of that party's opinions. He considers that something must be attributed, in the case of Monmouth "to the aptitude of a generous nature to adopt, and, if I may say so, to become enamoured of, those principles of justice, benevolence, and equality, which form the true creed of the party which he espoused."† To those who expected to find in the History the fiery and sustained declamation which enlivened his speeches, its perusal was a disappointment. He was less skilled with his pen than with his tongue, and he was morbidly afraid of making his History a written oration. Inclining to the opposite extreme, he became dry through dread of being declamatory. Yet some passages are exceedingly vivid and telling; the narratives of the rising of Argyll in the north, and of Monmouth in the south, are excellent. He often writes with a frankness which is very attractive; such a passage as the following, which does not stand alone, would do credit to any historian, alike for its form and for sentiments applicable to the reign in which the writer's lot was cast:—"One can never read Lewis's

* History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II., p. 34.
† Ibid., p. 167.

famous Declaration against the Hollanders, knowing the event which is to follow, without feeling the heart dilate with exultation, and a kind of triumphant contempt, which, though not consonant to the principles of pure philosophy, never fails to give the mind inexpressible satisfaction. Did the relation of such events form the sole or even any considerable part of the historian's task, pleasant indeed would be his labours; but, though far less agreeable, it is not a less useful or necessary part of his business to relate the triumphs of successful wickedness, and the oppression of truth, justice, and liberty."*

* History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II., p. 29.

VII.

JUDGMENT OF CONTEMPORARIES AND POSTERITY.

THE best judges among Fox's contemporaries ungrudgingly acknowledged that they had never heard his equal as a debater. Pitt spoke of him as a magician, and admitted that, when he thought he had surpassed himself, he was excelled by Fox. The fastidious Rogers declared that never in his life did he "hear anything equal to Fox's *speeches in reply;* they were wonderful. Burke did not do himself justice as a speaker; his manner was hurried, and he always seemed to be in a passion. Pitt's voice sounded as if he had worsted in his mouth." * Mr. Speaker Abbot thus writes in his Diary respecting Fox as contrasted with Pitt :—"Mr. Fox vehement in his elocution, ardent in his language, prompt in his invention of arguments, adroit in their use, comprehensive in his view of the given subject, and equal to his political rival in his power of agitating the passions; but offending continually by the tautology of his diction and the repetition of his arguments. He feels this himself so much, as to think it necessary to vindicate it in private. And he so feels also his own inferiority in the selection of appropriate terms, that he

* Dyce's Recollections of the Table Talk of Samuel Rogers, p. 79.

says, 'although he himself is never in want of words, Mr. Pitt is never without the best words possible.'" *

Charles Butler records that "Fox was heedless of method; having the complete command of good words, he never sought for better; if those which occurred expressed his meaning clearly and forcibly, he paid little attention to their arrangement or harmony. This detracts from the merit of his speeches when they are read; but, when they were delivered, it perhaps added to their effect, as it tended greatly to make the hearers believe that he was above art, and spoke from conviction. . . . The moment of his grandeur was, when, after he had stated the argument of his adversary, with much greater strength than his adversary had done, and with much greater than his hearers thought possible, he seized it with the strength of a giant, and tore and trampled it to destruction." "Mr. Fox had a captivating earnestness of tone and manner; Mr. Pitt was more dignified than earnest. The action of Mr. Fox was easy and graceful; Mr. Pitt's cannot be praised. It was an observation of the reporters in the gallery that it required great exertion to follow Mr. Fox while he was speaking, none to remember what he had said; that it was easy and delightful to follow Mr. Pitt, not so easy to recollect what had delighted them." †

Contemporaries, best acquainted with Pitt and Fox, were struck with the points of dissimilarity between them, while seeing much to admire in both. Yet not one of them has noted the most remarkable of all the differences. From the day that he first addressed the

* Diary and Correspondence of Lord Colchester, vol. i., p. 23.
† Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i., pp. 158, 160.

Commons in 1780, till he left it for his death-bed in 1806, Pitt never once delivered a great speech before any other assembly. He was elected member for Appleby without having to appear on the hustings; when a candidate to represent the University of Cambridge, he had never to open his lips. On receiving the freedom of the City of London on the 28th of February, 1784, at a period when it was still doubtful whether he would be able to maintain his ground as head of an Administration, and when a great speech addressed to the civic authorities might have benefited his cause, this is what he contented himself with saying in reply to the eloquent congratulations of Mr. Chamberlain Wilkes: "I beg to return you my best thanks for your very obliging expressions. Nothing can be more encouraging to me, in the discharge of my public duty, than the countenance of those, whom, from this day, I may have the honour of calling my fellow-citizens."* At another great crisis in his career, after Trafalgar had been won, when the Triple Alliance had been formed, and before Austerlitz was fought, Pitt, being the guest of the Lord Mayor, was enthusiastically toasted as the "saviour of Europe." He replied: "I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me; but Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, I trust, save Europe by her example." The Duke of Wellington pronounced this reply perfect. Earl Stanhope admires it beyond measure. Certainly, it is neatly turned and appropriate; but had Pitt never delivered any other speeches than those he addressed to the Corporation of London, he would not be classed among our greatest orators.

* Almon's Memoirs of Wilkes, vol. iv., p. 204.

That he might have proved himself a commanding public speaker is probable; but, as he never made the attempt, his oratorical fame rests exclusively on his speeches in Parliament. On the other hand, the reputation of Fox as an orator has been confirmed by the verdict of thousands who had opportunities to judge for themselves. On the hustings in Covent Garden, at public gatherings in Westminster Hall, at public banquets in Manchester and Liverpool, at dinners of the Whig Club, he spoke with as great impressiveness as from the front Opposition bench in the House. He swayed and charmed a promiscuous audience of his fellow-countrymen as completely as he did the select assembly which represented the nation.

Between two of the greatest Parliamentary orators in the reign of George the Third, and two of the greatest in the reign of Victoria, a striking and minute parallel might be drawn. The resemblance is notable even in its broad and superficial aspect. The store of rounded and rhetorical sentences which Pitt had ready for instant use was not more copious than that on which Mr. Gladstone can draw at pleasure and with equal effect. Consciousness of intellectual superiority and austerity of demeanour distinguish both. In listening to some of Mr. Gladstone's speeches, it is easy to understand what Pitt's contemporaries meant when they spoke of his state-paper style of oratory. Both reverence authority; Pitt thinking it his duty to acknowledge without reserve or limitation the supremacy of the Sovereign, Mr. Gladstone regarding it as his mission and privilege to vindicate and uphold the supremacy of the Church. The most notable variation between them is that Pitt's religion

resembled a piece of statecraft, whereas the religion of Mr. Gladstone is a part of his nature: the former showed his zeal for the Church by making his tutor a bishop, and his indifference to her services by seldom attending them; the latter is sensitively conscientious in dispensing ecclesiastical patronage, and rigidly exact in his devotional exercises. Both have had no equals in their mastery over finance, and in the skill with which they have made Budget speeches as intelligible as the alphabet and as attractive as a romance. Fox differed from Pitt as Mr. Bright differs from Mr. Gladstone, while the oratorical likeness between Mr. Bright and Fox is as close as that between Mr. Gladstone and Pitt. The "Man of the People" of the reign of George the Third is represented by the "Tribune of the People" in the reign of Victoria. In warmth of feeling; in sympathy with the down-trodden and oppressed; in hatred of tyrants; in reverence for the Constitution, coupled with a readiness to remove from it all excrescences and defects; in devotion to peace as the one thing needful for a great and self-respecting nation, combined with the purest and most ardent patriotism; in poetic imagination and humorous sallies united to the strongest common sense; in love and reverence for their noble mother-tongue which they have shown to be grandest when least adorned, most effective when spoken in homely simplicity,—Fox and Mr. Bright display an identity which is almost unprecedented. Whether we think of Pitt and Fox, or of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright, we see, in the following sentences of Charles Butler, the representation of their salient peculiarities. In Pitt's speeches, "his long amplifications, with his savings

and reserves, frequently made his hearers think him involved in an inextricable labyrinth; but light was sure to break in, to irradiate all he had said, and to lead to the brightest close. There never was a moment in which Mr. Fox was, either intentionally or unintentionally, obscure."*

Pitt's biographers have thought it necessary to try and clear him from the imputation of being uniformly haughty and unbending, and have laboured to prove that, though to all appearance an embodied sarcasm, he was sometimes a pleasant companion. If a statesman be disagreeable in public, it is no compensation to learn he is charming in private life. That Pitt's manner was icy and repulsive appears perfectly well authenticated, and it is difficult to believe there was not something acrid in his pleasantry when he deigned to unbend among friends. His enthusiastic admirers probably considered any deficiency in good-fellowship to be counterbalanced by his extraordinary talents.

There was more human nature in Fox. He had several failings, but reserve or haughtiness was not one of them. His knowledge of men was derived from intimate association with them. Among people of every rank or character he could make himself respected. In his own frank manner and thorough amiability of disposition, there was an attraction altogether irresistible. Lord Sidmouth had regarded the life and principles of Fox with pious horror; yet, when they sat in the same Cabinet, his biographer says that, "like the rest of mankind, he speedily became fascinated by Fox." When the latter died, Lord Sidmouth wrote:— "Of his talents there can be but one opinion. His

* Reminiscences of Charles Butler, vol. i., p. 191.

natural disposition deserved, I really believe, all that can be said in its favour. I never knew a man of more apparent sincerity, more free from rancour, or even severity; and hardly any one so entirely devoid of affectation." * Gibbon admired in him "the powers of a superior man, as they are blended in his attractive character with the softness and simplicity of a child. Perhaps no human being was ever more perfectly exempt from the taint of malevolence, vanity, or falsehood." † Mr. Trotter, who for a time acted as his private secretary, says that "Mr. Fox mortally hated hypocrisy and affectation; these were quite intolerable, in private and intimate society, to him, and he never assumed any appearance of esteem where he did not feel it." ‡ No man liked popularity more than he did, but he scorned with his whole soul to gain it by unworthy means. Yet his modesty was almost excessive. When the entire audience of the first theatre in Paris rose to do him honour, he shrank, with the diffidence of a girl, from acknowledging the compliment. Madame de Recamier, the greatest beauty of her day, had much difficulty in persuading him to take a drive with her, in order that the Parisians might see the distinguished Englishman who divided with her the admiration of the hour. Rogers relates that "Fox was very shy, and disliked being stared at. Windham and I accompanied him one night to Vauxhall, where he was much annoyed by being followed about, as a spectacle, from place to place. On such occasions he was not only shy, but *gauche.*" §

* Life of Lord Sidmouth, vol. ii., p. 434.
† Miscellaneous Works, vol. i., p. 168.
‡ Trotter's Memoirs of Fox, p. 311.
§ Recollections, p. 76.

A trifling act, not known to many of his contemporaries, and only made public a few years ago, has the same value, as an index of character, as Cromwell's order to Lely to paint him exactly as he was under penalty of not being paid a farthing. When Secretary of State in the Coalition Ministry, Fox commissioned Sir Joshua Reynolds to paint his portrait. At that time, his prospects as a Minister were brilliant; his famous East India Bill was passing rapidly through the House of Commons, and he desired that a copy of this Bill, of which he was justly proud, should be introduced into the picture, with his finger pointing towards it. Before the artist had finished his work, the House of Lords had rejected the Bill, and the Administration had been dismissed with contumely by the King, while the party led by Fox had been routed at the general election. Sir Joshua thought it complimentary to omit the title of the ill-fated measure from the scroll in the painting. Thereupon Fox wrote as follows to the artist, who at once did what was requested of him :—"If it is not too late to have one of the papers upon the table in my picture docketed 'A bill for the better regulating the affairs of the E. I. Company, &c.,' I should be much obliged if you would get it done immediately. If my object in this were only a little vanity, I should not be so anxious about it; but as I have told many persons that it would be so, and as I intend it shall be so whenever the picture goes home, the omission of the docket at the Exhibition at this particular time might be misconstrued into a desire of avoiding the public discussion upon a measure which will always be the pride of my life. This is the point upon which I am most anxious; but if

another paper could be docketed, 'Representation of the Commons to the King, March 15th, 1784,' it would be so much the better. I beg your pardon for troubling you upon these things, which may appear trifles, but which are not so, from the misconstructions that may be made." *

Despite their bitter rivalry, Pitt and Fox mutually respected and did justice to each other. Many instances in proof of this might be cited. Let the following one suffice :—"One night after Fox had been speaking, a noble lord, coming out of the House with Pitt, began to abuse Fox's speech ; 'Don't disparage it,' said Pitt; 'nobody could have made it but himself.'" "During the debates on the war with France I heard Fox characterize a speech of Pitt as 'one that would have excited the admiration and envy of Demosthenes.'" † No one, whatever his political bias, can question, with good reason, the real greatness of Pitt ; his excellent biographer, Earl Stanhope, while doing justice to his hero, has written about Fox in the same work, with scarcely less enthusiasm :—"As to the cause of this enduring attachment on the part of Fox's friends, we may acknowledge, in a great degree, his wondrous powers of mind, but chiefly and above all his winning warmth of heart. How delightful must Fox have been as a companion! How frank, how rich, how varied his flow of conversation! How high the privilege to visit him in the country retreat he loved so well—of sitting by his side beneath the cedars that he planted at St. Ann's." ‡

* Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. ii., pp. 429, 430.
† Rogers's Table Talk, p. 83.
‡ Life of Pitt, by Earl Stanhope, vol. i., p. 248.

When his sympathy with the French revolutionists had rendered him unpopular, he was daily the recipient of abusive letters signed "An Elector of Westminster." If, on opening the packet, he perceived the word "elector," he read no farther, but exclaimed, "Here's more paper for the cook." He observed that "Lord North read everything that was written against him, and rewarded those who wrote wittily; but I cannot imitate him, for I could wish to believe that I have no enemies."* The wish was worthy of him of whom Burke said, six years after their separation, "He is a man made to be loved." George the Third was his single avowed and implacable enemy. After Fox's death, when malice and hatred were alike vain, the King, being softened, said to Lord Sidmouth, "Little did I think that I should ever live to regret Mr. Fox's death."† He told his daughter, the Princess Mary, "I never thought I should have regretted the death of Mr. Fox so much as I do." ‡

Charles Butler sagaciously remarks, "Cardinal de Retz said to a person who taunted him with the superiority of Cardinal Mazarin, 'Give me the King but for one day, and you'll see which has the real superiority.' Mr. Fox never had the King with him, even for one hour."§ From the time he entered public life, he was in disfavour at Court. To have been the son of Lord Holland was his original sin. He added the further offence of independence in conduct and

* B. C. Walpole's Recollections of Fox, p. 166.
† Life of Lord Sidmouth, vol. ii., p. 435.
‡ Life and Times of Fox, by Lord Russell, vol. iii., p. 383. The Princess Mary repeated this to Earl Russell.
§ Reminiscences, vol. i., p. 165.

indisposition to place his oratorical powers, without reserve, at the disposal of his Sovereign for the glorification of the royal prerogative.

The King's early aversion to Fox was intensified after the latter became the champion of the Dissenters. In those days, the intolerance of Churchmen towards their fellow-Protestants, who conscientiously differed from them in particular opinions, was alike extraordinary and discreditable. It was gloried in as a species of loyalty. The forms under which it appeared were innumerable. This is one witnessed by Lord Eldon during a visit to Oxford: "I had a walk in New Inn Hall garden, with Dr. Johnson, Sir Robert Chambers, and some other gentlemen. Sir Robert was gathering snails, and throwing them over the wall into his neighbour's garden. The doctor reproached him very roughly, and stated to him that this was unmannerly and unneighbourly. 'Sir,' said Sir Robert, 'my neighbour is a Dissenter.' 'Oh,' said the Doctor, 'if so, Chambers, toss away, toss away as hard as you can.'" *

Fox was entirely devoid of bigotry. He rejected that spurious, but not wholly discredited, reading of Christianity which inspires men to hate certain of their neighbours. From the first he had been enlightened in his treatment of ecclesiastical topics. He early declared himself opposed to enforcing subscription at the Universities to the Thirty-nine Articles, intimating that "religion was best understood when least talked of." If he criticized religious beliefs, he did so impartially, pointing out in Parliament that, logically though not practically, the doctrine of election was

* Life of Lord Eldon, vol. i., p. 87.

fully "as hostile to morality as the absolution of the Pope," and stating that, while he "might not be so orthodox or so well-informed on those matters as some gentlemen," "on that point of absolution and forgiveness of sin he considered an English clergyman to be just the same as a Cardinal of Rome."* He held that the State had no right to interfere with religious professions or beliefs. He maintained that "men were to be judged by their actions, not by their thoughts." It mattered nothing to him, as a statesman, whether good and law-respecting citizens went to church, chapel, or mass-house. The first place in the list of privileges he gave to civil and religious freedom. Till he stood forth on their behalf, the Dissenters and the Roman Catholics had no advocate, among the members of the Established Church, so distinguished, consistent, and enthusiastic as Fox in giving expression to their wishes, or so thoroughly disinterested in urging their claims.

The war with America was regarded by him as a crusade against religious as well as civil liberty. By none were the American rebels denounced in stronger language, nor was the war against them applauded and supported with greater earnestness by any, than by the majority of the clergymen and bishops of our Church. Blameworthy eagerness was shown by the Lords spiritual in recommending and voting for measures of the most ruthless and bloody character. They detested the American colonists as dissenters from the Church as well as rebels against the State. In his dying hour, Bishop Keppel found comfort in the reflection that he had never given a vote for

* Speeches, vol. iv., pp. 150, 154.

hostilities against the colonists in America; not three of his brethren on the Episcopal Bench, at the dread moment when the upbraidings of conscience are least easily pacified, could sooth themselves with the same Christian-like thought.

Civil and religious liberty all over the world, which was the policy of Fox, became the watchword and creed of his party. He was liberal to the core. No statesman before him had proclaimed in the House of Commons that "the end of government is the happiness of the governed," that "liberty is the essence of the British Constitution;" had urged with equal force that religion and politics ought to be treated in their separate and appropriate spheres; had laboured to expel the sinister spirit of ecclesiasticism from Parliament; had never erred by confounding Churchianity with Christianity; had felt and avowed that the people might be trusted to be religious without compulsion, as they might be trusted to enjoy freedom without fear that they would abuse their opportunities. Nor did concessions to Dissenters, as they were styled, or acts of simple justice as Fox held them to be, if pressed in argument to their logical results, alarm or discourage him. When told that to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts would be to destroy the Church, he questioned whether such a result would ensue, yet he thought it "fully sufficient to answer, that if the majority of the people of England should ever be for the abolition of the Established Church, in such a case the abolition of the Church ought immediately to follow."*

All this was gall and wormwood to George the Third. No toast was better liked by him than that of "Church

* Speeches, vol. iv., p. 9.

and King!" These words were shouted by the ardent Churchmen who pillaged, and then set fire to the dwellings of Dr. Priestley and other Dissenters. When this toast was proposed at a public dinner at which Dr. Parr, a truly loyal and pious clergyman, was present, he exclaimed, "I will not drink that toast, nor will I suffer it to be given in my presence. It was the toast of Jacobites, and it is the yell of incendiaries; it means a Church *without* the Gospel, and a King *above* the Laws."*

Not even the most venerable precedents were sacred in the eyes of Fox. He declared, "that whenever any usage appeared subversive of the Constitution, if it had lasted for one or for two hundred years, it was not a precedent, but an usurpation."† His apparel was as distasteful to the King as his political conduct and opinions. The blue coat and buff waistcoat which he first made the fashion among his followers, and which afterwards became the badge of his party, closely resembled the military uniform worn by the levies commanded by Washington.

There was a time when the King assured Lord Malmesbury that he, too, was an old Whig. This probably meant that he was not as Fox and the new Whigs who were the advocates of peace, retrenchment, and reform. The royal announcement occurred after Burke, in the name of the old Whigs, had eulogized monarchy as a Divine institution, and had grown so reactionary and slavish in his doctrines as to warrant Grattan in saying, he was "such an enthusiastic admirer of kingly power, that he could not have slept

* Writings of Dr. Parr, vol. i., p. 369.
† Speeches, vol. iv., p. 431.

comfortably on his pillow, if he had not thought that the King had a right to carry it off from under his head."

The turning point in Fox's career was when the Dissenters, whom he had upheld against Church and Crown, joined the King and William Pitt against him. Doubtless they were as sincere as Pitt was in the conviction he professed to entertain, "that if Fox had carried the India Bill, he would have the Government entirely in his own hands, and the King be a cypher."* But they did not understand how necessary it was for the maintenance of free government that the monarch should become a virtual cypher; neither did they perceive the true nobility of aim which inspired the legislation of Fox with respect to India. He, indeed, was combating in the interests of humanity, quite as much as in those of his party, and, when so doing, he was ready to stake and lose every personal advantage. "He was aware the measure he had proposed was a strong one. He knew that the task he had that day set himself was extremely arduous and difficult; he knew that it had considerable risk in it; but when he took upon himself an office of responsibility, he had made up his mind to the situation, and the danger of it. He had left all thought of ease, indolence, and safety behind him."†

Deserted and calumniated by those from whom he had the best reason to expect friendly support and generous appreciation, he was ousted from power, and lost the authority he would have worthily employed to establish civil and religious liberty, and restore to the people the prerogatives that had been filched

* Diaries of George Rose, vol. i., p. 96.
† Speeches, vol. ii., p. 212.

from them by the Crown. When too late, those who had turned against him at the critical juncture repented them of their error. He forgave the defection, and untiringly advocated the liberties he regarded as the birthright of all his fellow-countrymen. Eloquent appeals he preferred on their behalf, but he was powerless to do more. His approval of the Revolution in France still further weakened his influence as a legislator, and rendered the King a still more bitter and relentless antagonist. For a brief space, the prospect brightened. In 1806, George the Third was obliged to call to his councils the greatest of living statesmen. Patriots had been desponding for the country; but, with Fox in high office, confidence instantly revived. Seldom, in our history, has a single name been so truly a tower of strength to the nation. The few months that he served his country in office were months during which she was again felt as a power in Europe. The bold front she presented in the hour of internal weakness saved her from the shock she might have had to endure from the victor who had prostrated half the Continent at Austerlitz, and became master of nearly the whole after Jena. Fox carried conciliation to its utmost limit, while maintaining the firm tone of one strong in the strength of a good cause. Those who had misjudged him were surprised at his vigour not less than at his consummate tact. After the lapse of a generation, it was seen that a spirit, as high and determined as that manifested by Chatham in his prime, was infused into the conduct of foreign affairs. Never did the ship of state appear more majestic and commanding than when Fox

> "Stood for his country's glory fast,
> And nailed her colours to the mast."

George the Third, who had done his utmost to hinder Fox from benefiting his country, was in the main most successful. The King's personal triumph was attended with the severance from the mother-land, in anger, of thirteen magnificent Provinces; with protracted misgovernment in India; with the oppression of Protestant Dissenters; with the cruel treatment of Roman Catholics; with the repeated suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* Act; with the suppression of public meetings; with the restriction of free discussion in the Press; with a war to compel the French to submit to be ruled by Bourbon kings; with the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives; with an addition to the National Debt of seven hundred millions sterling, and with the gain of a few islands in the Tropics.

No other English constitutional monarch acted so uniformly as George the Third did as a personal ruler, had so much of his own way, and had so melancholy a fate: Frequently, during his reign, his reason was eclipsed. In 1765, in 1788, in 1801, and in 1804, he was temporally incapacitated for discharging the formal duties of sovereignty. In 1806 he became stone-blind; in 1811 he became hopelessly mad; a few years afterwards he became stone-deaf. Such a spectacle excites commiseration to the exclusion of criticism, and inclines the beholder to recall the better points in his character instead of dwelling upon his gross and irreparable faults. It was his misfortune that, being intended by nature to be a farmer, accident placed him on a throne. He abounded in the domestic virtues; loved his family circle; made his palace a home. In the possession of great personal courage, he

was a typical English king. When his life was threatened by the assassin, he was less unnerved than the spectators who ran no risk. He had resolved to head his troops in person, in the event of Bonaparte landing; and there can be no doubt that he would have shown all the daring and bravery in the presence of the enemy which William the Third displayed at Landen, and George the Second at Dettingen. Being so brave himself, there is pathos in his confession to Mr. Rose—"I thank God there is but one of my children who wants courage, and I will not name him, for he is to succeed me." * A bad king, George the Third had some qualities as a man which merit admiration. His son and successor, one of the worst of kings, was the vilest of men.

Whilst the active enmity of his vindictive Sovereign nullified the services which Fox might have rendered to his country, the King's partiality for Pitt enabled the latter to prove himself, if not the first among statesman, at least worthy of a place "in the very first line." To magnify the merits of either leader of opposing parties, at the expense of the other, is easy and would be indefensible. It is an entire perversion of fact to depict them as irreconcilably hostile. The Toryism of Pitt was not that which Eldon, Liverpool, and Sidmouth falsely professed in his name; it was almost identical with the Liberalism of a later generation. The one serious difference of opinion between Pitt and Fox related to the amount and degree of deference which ought to be paid to the King's wishes and prejudices in affairs of state policy. Fox never swerved from his original

* Diaries of George Rose, vol. ii., p. 194.

contention, that the royal prerogative should be exercised in the interests of the people; that the Monarch's sceptre should be subordinated to the Speaker's mace; that a Ministry possessing the confidence of Parliament should perform the real functions of government, and that the Sovereign should execute simple formalities. The opposite view which Pitt had taken and acted upon, he recanted by implication, and he virtually ceased to be a recreant Whig by desiring Fox, in 1792 and 1804, to unite with him upon his own terms in carrying on the government. Concerning the great and essential principles of state policy, they were in thorough accord. While a peace Minister, Pitt attained his real greatness; as a peace Minister, it was the ambition of Fox to serve his country. Both approved of American independence, a reform in Parliament, the abolition of the Slave Trade, the removal of Catholic disabilities; while, in the unharvested field of financial reform, Pitt was in advance of his rival. Their disagreements were chiefly speculative; the points on which they were in perfect harmony were alike practical and important. To both, an everlasting debt of gratitude is owing by their country for doctrines enunciated, for principles upheld, for work done. Both died before accomplishing a tithe of what they had contemplated and laboured to perform. But they did not depart before their renown was assured. Whatever they had in common that was excellent in principle and patriotic in aim has had ample justification and fruition in the most beneficial legislation of the age in which we live. Side by side in the hallowed peace of the grave, they repose after protracted, keen, and unselfish rivalry in

the service of their country. They are great twin brethren in fame.

As the Minister who long held high office and enjoyed the favour of his Sovereign, Pitt has had an incalculable advantage over Fox. The lofty station and the imposing performances of the former impress the most superficial observer. The leader of the Opposition did less which inflames the imagination and lives in the memory. Enough, however, survives to make us regret that he was hindered from doing more; what is known of him personally enhances the admiration he commands as a statesman. In geniality of disposition, warmth of heart, largeness of sympathy, freedom from prepossessions and exclusiveness, he is unsurpassed among party leaders. Lord Erskine, writing with the experience and knowledge of a long and close intimacy, says, "He possessed, of all men I ever knew, the most gentle and yet the most ardent spirit —a rare and happy combination; he had nourished in his mind all the manly and generous sentiments, which are the true supports of the social world; he was tremblingly alive to every kind of private wrong or suffering, and from the habitual and fervent contemplation of the just principles of government, he had the most bitter and unextinguishable contempt for the low arts of political intrigue, and an indignant abhorrence of every species of tyranny, oppression, and injustice."* He was in fact, as well as in phrase, the "Man of the People." By the people, he meant the whole body of his countrymen, without distinction of class or creed or rank. He knew that his countrymen could be trusted to preserve the Constitution of which the

* Introduction to Fox's Speeches, vol. i., p. xiii.

essence is liberty, to honour its traditions by adapting it to the varying needs of society, to glory in its antiquity while perpetually engaged in renewing its youth. Before him the Whig party was an aristocratic caste; he made it the party of reform and progress; after him it carried a few sweeping measures and then, exhausted by the effort or disinclined to continue the work, returned to its early original. He is the only great Whig leader who has been implicitly trusted and unhesitatingly followed alike by the greatest and proudest peer and the poorest and humblest elector, who has proved himself qualified for acting as a daysman between the noble and the commoner. A mere Whig of the present day is as true a Tory as Lord Liverpool. A thorough-going Liberal of the present day is a Whig of the type of Fox.

Few Englishmen have established a better claim than he to world-wide homage and respect. No other English statesman of a bygone generation has earned a more indisputable title to the affectionate regard of the citizens of the United States. In Russia, a country where jealousy of England is as keen and general as in America, and where indisposition to do justice to our public men is as marked, it would be strange if an exception were not made in favour of Fox, seeing that his sympathy and assistance contributed to further Russian prosperity, and that he deemed it advantageous to civilization that Russian progress should lessen Turkish power. Nor ought the countrymen of Frederick the Great fail to honour him who made it a condition of his foreign policy, during the lifetime of that famous king, to foster a good understanding between the Courts of Berlin and

St. James's. M. Charles de Rémusat, and others equally well entitled to speak with authority, have proclaimed that the name of Fox is very dear to France. Still, none of the testimonies in his favour, which might be gleaned from the records of civilized countries during the past hundred years, is either more impressive or more honourable to him than the mute witness borne to the humanity and beneficence of his policy by those who never heard his name; by negroes who are the free offspring of African bondsmen, and by meek Hindoos enjoying the blessing of mild and equitable rule. Should the nations of the world ever exhibit a preference for peace over war, not on paper only, but in their actual practice, and resolve, in perfect good faith, to exhaust every amicable method for settling their disputes before resorting to the arbitrament of the largest battalions or the heaviest broadsides, the result will be the consummation of Fox's international policy as correctly summarized and set forth by Dr. Parr: "Like a wise man of whom we read, he, in times of apparent tranquillity, would not have been wholly unprepared for war. But he would have made peace, and tried to keep it, in the spirit of peace."

Although his abhorrence of wrong and his sympathy with human suffering were co-extensive with the habitable globe, yet his affections centred in his native land; his patriotism was as genuine as his philanthropy. He was quite as eager and active in promoting peace and goodwill at home as in maintaining kindly relations abroad. For no section of his fellow-countrymen did he entertain the prejudices only too common in his day; he never asked whether one of

them had been born south or north of a river, in one or other of two islands. As a natural consequence, the natives of each of the three kingdoms, who acknowledged him as their leader, manifested for him an attachment of equal earnestness and strength. When his friends in England were for the moment powerless to aid him, he obtained in Scotland the assistance he required. Unjustly excluded from Parliament as member for Westminster, he took his seat in the House of Commons as the representative of a Scottish constituency. As a Scotch member, he delivered his speech on the Westminster scrutiny, the most finished of all his speeches—the speech which Brougham counselled Macaulay to study and get by heart in order to acquire the art of parliamentary oratory. The adherents of Fox in Scotland founded the *Edinburgh Review*. His political principles took root there in a congenial soil; how they have fructified, and how rich has been the harvest, let the political action of Scottish constituencies testify.

Reverence for any English statesman is a rare product of Irish growth. Yet the man whom Grattan pronounced the best friend of his country ought to be respected by every Irishman. When a Minister in 1782, Fox laboured with success to remove what was then the worst grievance of Ireland. He never let an opportunity slip for advocating justice to the Irish. Pleading their cause in 1796, he made this avowal in the House of Commons:—"Sir, I love the Irish nation. I know a good deal of that people. I know much of Ireland from having seen it; I know much from private friendship with individuals. The Irish may have their faults, like others. They may have a quick feeling of

injury, and not be very patient under it; but I do affirm, that, of all their characteristics, there is not one feature more predominant in every class of the country, from the highest to the lowest order, than gratitude for benefactions, and sensibility to kindness." * Unless Fox erred grievously when he uttered the foregoing words, or unless the Irish make an exception in his case, such as they have never yet made in that of any one who had aided, admired, and appreciated them, his memory ought to be fondly cherished in Ireland.

The greatness of Fox as the leader of the Whig party is undisputed. Many who do not belong to that party think Sheridan spoke without any exaggeration when he said in the House of Commons that he was

> "Like a great sea-mark, standing every flaw
> And saving those that eye it."

Nevertheless, some now suppose his policy to be effete, and his opinions antiquated; look upon his views as altogether out of harmony with modern requirements; deny to his teaching anything which merits serious thought and practical adoption. It is hastily assumed that, because the Whigs of our day revere him as their great prototype, they must necessarily be faithful representatives of his policy and exponents of his doctrines. The modern Whigs, properly so called, are a handful of well-meaning, high-minded, wealthy, and, in private life, estimable men. Their existing political creed enjoins the worship of their political ancestors as their first, if not only, duty. Liberal in profession, in their hearts they detest change.

* Speeches, vol. vi., p. 448.

If they must advance, they do so with as great reluctance, and with as many longing glances to the rear, as Mr. Ready-to-halt. They are ashamed to take their places in the Tory ranks, and they hesitate to cast in their lot with the Liberals. They cherish the vain hope of one day regaining all their former power on the formation of a third party composed of Liberals whose hearts have failed them, and of Tories whose education has been so far complete, as to render them dissatisfied with their associates, without being thorough enough to fit them for uniting with their opponents. That they should honour Fox as a statesman is perfectly proper, but for them to claim an exclusive heritage in his renown is absurd. Their principles are crystallized truisms, pleasing to behold, but worthless for all practical purposes; the principles of Fox can never become obsolete or inapplicable, or cease to be living and efficient, so long as the British Constitution continues to grow and alter with the revolving years and the changing times.

Not the small and exclusive section of modern Whigs, who seem to think now, as Sir Thomas Browne thought two centuries ago, that "it is too late to be ambitious," and that "the great mutations of the world are acted," who are satisfied that every necessary reform has already been accomplished through their instrumentality and that nothing really beneficial remains to be performed, but members of the great party of progress have the best title to rank Fox among their noblest and worthiest chiefs. Although they may not trumpet forth his name, or blazon it upon their banner, yet they work in his spirit, and advance his principles. Their ideal is universal brother-

hood and perpetual peace. Their programme is as inexhaustible as human wants; they desire to render their country less an object of fear than of rivalry; a great example to mankind, rather than a haughty and domineering Power in the world. For the blessings they enjoy they are thankful, but they cannot rest while there is a wrong to be redressed or a benefit to be wrought. Many triumphs they have achieved; others, and far greater ones, are yet in store. Every victory of justice over prejudice, in which reason has acquired the ascendancy and through which the happiness of the people has been increased, bears fresh testimony to the wisdom of the counsels, to the genuineness of the patriotism, to the excellence of the statesmanship displayed by Charles James Fox as leader of the Opposition under George the Third.

THE END.

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